

Summary: In the post-apocalyptic world of the 22nd Century, Voldemort rules all. The Resistance sends the Weasley family's last descendant back in time to the year 1943 to kill the boy Lord Voldemort once was: Tom Riddle.

Author Notes: This is the new, revamped version of 'Out of Shadow.' There were some things that were driving me crazy about the original, so I finally stopped being lazy and changed them to my whim... the core is the same, of course, so enjoy! I've edited this first chapter and will be doing the others as I go.

This story results from my musings on Riddle/Voldemort's character, and what kind of girl he might actually have gone for... This first chapter is a lot of back story, how Honora's world has come to be, so bear with me. Also, I know the general feeling about OCs... I don't usually like them either. However, I have done my utmost to make interesting, multidimensional characters. Despite all appearances of this first chapter, she's not an MS... I promise.

Reviews are very welcome! Thanks!

Disclaimer: I do not own anything in the Harry Potter universe; JK Rowling does.

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Chapter 1

Polaris

The guard shivered and pulled his furs closer to his throat. 'Typical,' he muttered. The icy wind stole the word from his mouth and flung it into the steel-grey sea.

There were three unfortunate souls who had guard duty that night. All were under the age of twenty-five; one was a woman and two were men. They walked along black volcanic rock that was sharp beneath the soles of their shoes. A biting chill penetrated the Warming Charms that protected them. The island they patrolled was no more than a kilometre across, a tiny blister of a place, totally unremarkable.

There were no structures on the surface. This tiny volcanic island that peeked its stony head above the icy waters of the North Atlantic was made Unplottable by various wards and charms, a security measure necessary for survival.

Above the hooded heads, deep black clouds skittered fast across the twilight sky. They were backlit with green. In other, more innocent times, it might have been called the aurora, that fabulous light display found in the far northern latitudes. However, the guards of the island of Polaris knew better. There was no such whimsical explanation for the poisonous magical residue that seeped all over the atmosphere these days.

‘When does our shift end?’ one of the men called out.

‘Not for another seven hours,’ came the reply. ‘Hold your hippogriffs.’

A snort of laughter. ‘Those are extinct. Everybody knows that.’

‘It’s just an expression.’ Another wind kicked up off the ocean, sending spray over their heads, making conversation impossible.

Below their feet, through many metres of thick, heavy rock, another scene took place. It was a great hall, filled with fifty or so people, and golden with light and warmth. The people within the island felt as safe as they could, knowing that their home was guarded. There was laughter and talking and anticipation. It was a coming-of-age celebration for one of their own, a girl who sat for the first time at the head table, a girl who thought herself quite important on that day. She had red hair.

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By the year 2112, all was ice. The world, changed forever by evil, lost its motivation to grow and live. Like a half-life, like a planet sucking the cursed blood of a slain unicorn, the diminished population wept but their tears froze before hitting the ground.

There was but one who remembered the world otherwise. Their ruler, their master, their Dark Lord who stalked his halls immortal, forever

white and terrible. He dispensed a mockery of justice as a self-fashioned god and made no pretences at mercy.

But beneath this world of hurt, a few outposts of light remained. Hope was not lost.

The Resistance was scattered and small, hiding in the tiny places. On islands, high in the mountains, in the middle of vast cold desert wastes they clung together, as they clung to the old ways, to the light. They called themselves the Shadow Kingdoms. Golden as the windows of a farmhouse on a dark night but winking out at the attention of the formidable Dark armies that hunted them, within such caves and grottoes there could still be found a laugh and a song. Each outpost was ruled over by the best witch or wizard, contacting the others only once a year; any more travel or communication than that was considered too risky.

The Shadow Kingdoms were the hidden fighters who would not give in to the Dark Lord Voldemort. Immortal as he was, they retained hope that someday there would arise one who might defeat him. Since the Last War of the early twenty-first century, that hope grew fainter by the day.

In the northern island enclave known as Polaris, a girl grew up by the name of Honora Crowley; all her life she was surrounded by darkness and fear. Honora had been raised by her maternal grandmother, Eleanor Weasley-Demetrius. Her own parents had disappeared when she was only three years old, lost on a mission to one of the Kingdoms hidden away up in the European Alps. Honora did not remember her parents well. She had never discovered what had happened to them, but since they disappeared in a mountainous region she always suspected giants were involved.

It was a bitter cold day in February when Honora Crowley turned seventeen. Of course, Polaris was always bitter cold. The winter when Honora came of age was by far the coldest she could remember, however. The world's climate was changing, a result of the vast and powerful Dark magic that held it in a death grip.

Honora's seventeenth year was the year that would change her life.

‘Happy birthday, young one!’ said Julius Talbot, the First Wizard, ruler of Polaris, just before Honora’s birthday toast.

‘Seventeen isn’t so young,’ Honora protested. ‘I’m of age now! Freya turned seventeen last year and she’s already doing guard duty,’ she gestured to her best friend, a blonde-haired and blue-eyed witch named Freya Lief.

‘And so she is,’ the First agreed, his aged eyes lighting up with mirth. ‘Honora, I take it you are eager to begin guard duties yourself, then?’

Honora gulped. The truth was she was dreading it. Guard duties meant dressing head-to-toe in fur, braving the wind and ice, the cold so bone-chilling that even strong warming charms meant little against it. ‘Uh, yes sir?’ she said, confidently she hoped.

Julius laughed. ‘I’m glad! Without such enthusiasm from the new generations, I’m sure Polaris would have succumbed to the Death Eaters years ago.’ He took a sip of his mead. ‘*Sonorus*,’ he brandished his wand. ‘Ladies and gentlemen!’ his amplified voice began, echoing through the large stone-hewn common hall. ‘Witches and wizards of esteem! Today Honora comes of age.’ He gestured down at white-clad Honora, her dark auburn hair pulled into a crown around her head.

‘We give thanks and celebration for a new citizen of the Shadow Kingdoms, a very special young lady, and the last remaining member of the fabled Weasley line.’

Applause broke out in the hall. Honora smiled at her grandmother, and all her friends. Polaris was her home and she knew everyone in it as well as she knew her own self. Besides, it was always fun to be the centre of attention. Her glance paused on Marlow Woden, another of her friends. Honora’s glacial blue eyes met Marlow’s dark brown ones with a crinkle of a smile.

With the toast over, Honora raised her glass of wine and stood up. ‘Thank you, everyone!’ she said brightly, tipping her glass back as she sipped and then flashed a brilliant smile on the company. More applause ensued as everyone began their feast. The twelve house-

elves of Polaris had really made an effort with the food. Honora sat back down next to her grandmother.

‘How do you feel?’ Eleanor asked, her thin mouth curled up in a smile.

‘Hmm.’ Honora thought for a moment. ‘No different, really. Should I?’

‘No, I remember I did not feel differently when I came of age. At least not right away...’ Eleanor Weasley’s papery cheeks grew pink as she seemed to recollect something. ‘That was the year I met your grandfather, Adam Demetrius.’

‘Oh! That’s right!’ Honora swallowed her bite of scrumptious roasted duck. ‘Tell me the story again, Grandmother?’

Eleanor smiled again. ‘Well, you know how it was in those days. The Death Eaters were hunting us ferociously, everything was tense and dangerous...even more so than right now. We are lucky to be in a lull at the moment.’

‘And? What about Grandfather?’ Honora prompted, digging into her rosemary potatoes.

‘He was an Auror. I was in training to be a Healer. And eat more slowly, dear, your exuberance is worrying me. You might choke.’

‘Sorry,’ Honora told herself to chew more slowly. ‘Come on, Grandmother, tell me!’

Eleanor laughed. ‘Well, a long time ago, Aurors were Dark Wizard hunters,’ she said. ‘By the time I was born in 2028, they were the only line of defence for the Shadow Kingdoms, like they are today. The warrior-heroes. And Adam was the best of them. He was so handsome, and so glamorous. I was taken with him immediately.’

‘How did you meet?’ Honora sing-songed, even though she already knew the story by heart.

Eleanor smiled indulgently. ‘We had a grindylow infestation, down in the water caverns. The lesser demons were already working for He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, then. One of our workers had been

attacked, and I went down into the caverns to attend to him. The First Wizard at that time, Malcolm Thomas, asked for several Aurors to come in and exterminate the grindylows...and Adam was one of the Aurors. I met him in the caverns, when I was soaking wet and scared and just trying to remember my healing spells...He told me later that he fell in love with me the minute he saw me, even though I must have looked a fright!' Eleanor laughed. 'Yes, Adam Demetrius was the man for me, from the very beginning.'

Honora sighed. 'It's so wonderful that you both knew right away. I've never felt that with anyone!' She looked up at the ceiling dramatically.

'Well, dear, you are only just seventeen,' Eleanor replied. 'Don't be in too much of a rush to grow up. The world is serious enough, and you are a breath of fresh air just as you are.'

Honora leaned over and kissed her grandmother's cheek. 'Thanks!' she chirped. It was true; Honora rarely felt the weight of the world on her shoulders. Although Polaris was clinging to the edge of existence, under threat by the Dark Lord all the time, within its stone walls was the warmth of family and friends and good magic. Honora felt secure and happy within its cocoon. Still...there was something else inside her, too. A yearning, a thirst, for something she could not name.

She wondered if it came from her Weasley ancestors. She was the last of them. The name of Weasley was lost now; since Honora's mother Adaire had wed her father, Felix Crowley, a half-English, half-Egyptian wizard who had given Honora her pale honey complexion. However, the Weasley blood was within her: her great-great-grandparents were Bill and Fleur Weasley. It was a sign of those desperate times in the Last War that none of the other members of the large Weasley family had lived long enough to have children.

Of course, Honora had heard the story as it had passed from Eleanor. The famous Weasleys, the loyal friends of the great lost Harry Potter. The mythology of her own heritage fascinated Honora. She only wished that things had turned out better for all of them.

Arthur and Molly Weasley had had seven children. Their eldest, Bill, Honora's great-great-grandfather, had married the legendary beauty Fleur Delacour (who was part-Veela, herself). Arthur and Molly's next

son, Charlie, had been an adventuresome sort but had been killed in a dragon attack. Voldemort had sought the dragons soon after he sought the giants as part of his army of darkness, and the treacherous dragons had turned on their own handlers. The younger twins, Fred and George, owned their own business. They had been blown up in the final attack on London's Diagon Alley, fighting valiantly by all surviving accounts.

Then there were the youngest Weasleys: Ginny and her brother Ron, along with Ron's wife, Hermione Granger-Weasley. That story always captivated Honora's attention, like watching something horrible happen but being unable to tear your eyes away. Ron and Hermione, Harry Potter's best friends, had been killed with him during the final battle. And Ginny Weasley herself, Harry Potter's own fiancé, had been captured and later murdered by Death Eaters.

The personal tragedy of it all was too remote in time to have any real affect on Honora. But she still thought with a detached grimness toward her lost and persecuted family. Things had gone so wrong, and no one really knew why. After Voldemort's victory the whole world had changed. With no one to oppose him, the Dark Lord had rampaged through all of Europe, gathering all kinds of followers, and not just wizards, either. The giants, the dragons, the werewolves, the goblins, the dementors, the dark creatures...all had sworn allegiance to Voldemort on promises of spoils and Muggle blood. Muggle-born wizards were killed wherever they were found.

The war had spilled over to the Muggle world, as well. Soon the Muggle governments in Europe were secretly controlled by Voldemort. Then it was the United States, and Africa, and then the entire planet. The Dark Lord condensed them all into a fascist overlord-ship that imprisoned all the remaining Muggles in the world. The Muggles were kept in the dark, occupied with a hyper-realistic form of entertainment called 'virtual reality.' At the age of ten, magic tests were performed on all Muggle children. Any witches or wizards born into Muggle families were exterminated if they were discovered.

Most of the pure-blood families had joined Voldemort after Harry Potter's defeat. The very few that did not...they formed the Shadow

Kingdoms, the underground. By Honora's time, they barely clung to survival.

Truthfully, sometimes a part of her wanted to appear before the Dark Lord and just throw herself on his mercy. Honora had such high spirits, and high *ambitions*, for herself. There was hardly a place for her in Polaris, or any of the Shadow Kingdoms. They were so concerned with staying alive and undetected that there was no growth, no opportunity for anything except defence against an overwhelming foe.

Honora thought that had she lived in Harry Potter's time, she would have wanted to work for the Ministry of Magic. So much opportunity, so many interesting things to study and discover...and maybe become a great leader herself. Show others the way to truth and happiness and all the rest.

As was the custom for all Shadow Kingdom children, she had been taught magic by a coalition of her elders, including her grandmother Eleanor and the First Wizard himself, Julius Talbot. Along with the others her age, Marlow, Freya, Jasper Gallows, and the overweight, over-giggly Lithia Poundstone, Honora had gone through her lessons in Defence, Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, Healing, Herbology...all the subjects required of a good witch. Honora knew she was the best in her small class. She read voraciously and took a genuine love to learning. Her grandmother joked that if Honora had gone to Hogwarts in the olden days, she would have been sorted into Ravenclaw.

Hogwarts. Honora thought of the name with chill down her spine. *The Dark Lord's headquarters.* It was now the centre of his global empire, its ancient magic working for him. Honora knew that Voldemort must be the only person still alive who remembered what it once was: a school for young witches and wizards. After all, the Dark Lord had outlived all of his original followers, being immortal himself. Honora was not convinced that he was immortal; he must have a weakness somewhere. It was just that no one had discovered it yet.

The desserts of her birthday feast appeared on the table in front of her as Honora brought herself back to the present. Yes, home in

Polaris was friendly. Perhaps it was the wine she had been drinking, but Honora was all of a sudden overcome with restlessness. She wanted to get *out*, to see the world (or what was left of it), make a name for herself. She wanted, in fact, for the Dark Lord Voldemort himself to fear *her* name.

‘Someday,’ she muttered.

‘What was that, dear?’ Eleanor turned to her.

‘Oh, nothing,’ Honora put her normally cheerful expression back on her face. ‘Just thinking about my sticky toffee pudding.’

The torches were burning down in the stone hall, and the guests were getting steadily merrier by the minute. Finishing her pudding, Honora got up from the head table and joined Freya and Marlow by perching herself on the edge of their own long wooden table.

‘So, how does it feel to be an adult?’ Freya laughed at her.

‘Why don’t you tell me?’ Honora joked back. ‘You’ve been one for five months now, and you still don’t act like it.’

‘Hey!’ Freya tossed her golden-blond hair. ‘That’s not true. Just ask Jasper,’ she winked over at her beau. ‘He’ll tell you.’

‘I don’t think you want him to tell everyone what you’ve been up to,’ Marlow broke in with a grin.

‘Huh?’ Jasper realised he was being discussed. ‘What did I do?’

‘Or is it ‘who’ did you do?’ Honora giggled wickedly.

‘Honora!’ Freya gasped. ‘I’m shocked!’ she exclaimed, although she did not look shocked.

‘Oh, don’t worry, we know you two won’t do anything, erm, rash,’ Marlow said, his face starting to blush. He glanced up at Honora, and she smiled back.

Honora moved herself down onto their bench, next to Marlow. He casually slung an arm around her. She pretended not to notice. Honora was not sure about her feelings for Marlow. He was in love with her, she was quite certain. And he was a nice boy, tall with brown hair and lovely eyes. However, he lacked something, and she could not put her finger on what it was. Marlow was safe, and kind, and good. He would treat her well for the rest of her life. All of Polaris was expecting them to get married, sooner or later; Honora had heard two of the older witches gossiping about it.

With a toss of her head, she reached for some firewhisky. Quickly glancing around, she saw that most of the older citizens were engrossed in their own conversations, or dancing, or playing wizard's games. The younger children had been put to bed. Grinning mischievously, Honora suggested a drinking game.

'We can't! We're sure to get told off,' objected Marlow.

'Oh, don't be such a goody-goody,' Honora replied with exasperation. A slight look of hurt appeared on Marlow's face. 'Don't you want me drunk?' she flirted with him, trying to rectify her little mistake.

Marlow grudgingly smiled.

'Freya? Are you in?' asked Honora.

'Okay,' Freya agreed. 'Jasper's in, too, right sweetheart?' she tousled Jasper's blonde hair. They would have very blonde babies someday.

'Whatever you say, love,' Jasper said.

Someone coughed behind them, in an outburst that sounded a lot like 'Whipped!'

'Lithia!' Honora grinned up at the large girl. 'Join us?'

'Of course,' Lithia said, the table rattling as she sat down.

They played the 'Name Game' with increasing exuberance, the firewhisky taking effect. Honora felt herself getting drunk. She had been drunk before, but never openly. Once she had induced Freya

into stealing four bottles of wine, which they consumed one night, laughing and sharing deepest darkest secrets. Honora had rashly proclaimed that one day she would take Lord Voldemort's place as ruler of the world. Freya had looked horrified until Honora giggled and said she was only kidding, after all.

It was nearly midnight when Honora and her friends finished off the bottle of firewhisky. Honora was well and truly smashed, as she stumbled her way through the carved stone tunnels to her home apartment. Marlow had her by the arm, although he was just as inebriated. Honora giggled hysterically and Marlow chuckled along, although she could not remember what was so funny. They reached the thick wooden door, marked in glowing white letters, 'Eleanor Weasley-Demetrius and Honora Crowley.'

'Well, we're here,' Honora said quietly. She looked into his face and realised with dread that he was about to make some sort of declaration.

'Honora,' he slurred. 'I love you.'

She gulped. 'Marlow, I—'

'I do, I love you. Do you love me too?'

'Marlow, I'm tired. You're drunk. Hell, I'm drunk.' She gently pushed him off of her. 'I'm sorry. Look, why don't you just take a walk. Get some air. Just get away from me.'

Marlow got the familiar look of perplexed hurt. 'Wait, Honora!'

'No. I'm going to sleep.' She made a motion of sleep with her two hands. 'I'll see you in the morning.'

She waved her hand over the lock on her door and slipped inside before he could say anything else. For a half-second, she felt a little bad for Marlow, since she had flirted with him all night and then not followed through. But the thought only flitted through her head briefly before she mumbled to herself about how it was not her fault if he fancied her. With a wave of numbed dizziness, Honora slumped down the wall. A single candle burned on the table, although to her it

looked like about five candles. Her head nodded down, and she fell asleep, right inside her own door.

Chapter 2

Centurion

‘Honora. Wake up, Honora. This is no time for sleep.’

‘Hmmp?’ Honora felt pain lace through her forehead. ‘No, Grandmother, I want to sleep...’ she fell over completely.

SMACK! Honora jumped to attention as her grandmother actually slapped her across the face.

‘Wake up!’

‘Grandmother!’ Honora held a hand to her own pale face, looking up in bleary-eyed shock. ‘What in the world--?’

‘Polaris is under attack. We have to go down to the dungeons. It’s not safe here. Now get up, for the love of Harry Potter!’ Eleanor whirled through the room, her healing potions flying into an open valise. ‘Now, girl!’

Honora scrambled to her feet, and then groaned as more pain went through her head. An attack on Polaris? Death Eaters? This was not good, especially for the morning of a hangover. She was still wearing her white dress from her birthday feast, but there was no helping that now. She went as quickly as she could manage into her room, and grabbed her wand (hazel, unicorn hair, eleven inches) and a heavy fur stole. It was cold down in the dungeons. She rejoined her grandmother who rushed her out the door, setting a locking charm behind her.

The narrow rock corridors were dark, echoing, and several other people were running, clutching bags of belongings, faces white with alarm. Honora felt her blood pounding through her heart, matching her racing footsteps. A sense of imminent panic filled the air. Honora began to feel scared. It looked serious. She could hear children crying, and then someone screaming. Yes, it looked very serious, although her muddled head was still confused as to what was happening.

She followed Eleanor down tight spiralling steps, down into the dungeons. The staircase would retract as soon as everyone was safe down below. In the dank, low-ceilinged space, Honora caught a glimpse of Freya and Jasper, huddled together. *Half-dressed*, she thought wryly. She saw Lithia, with her parents. Marlow was nowhere in sight. Nearly every other inhabitant of Polaris was there, eyes wide and anxious. Children clung tightly to their parents, sensing the chaos, the danger.

Honora had been in the dungeons before, but never had they seemed so dark, oppressive, the weight of the entire island pressing down on the rough-chiselled ceiling. They really were no better than caves, and a steady dripping of water could be heard plinking above the terrified whispers of the people.

A loud bang issued from above, causing dusty bits of rock to puff down on their heads, and Honora jumped. *What if the Death Eaters get in? What if we are all killed? her tired mind shrilled at her. What if this is the end for all of us?*

‘Stop it,’ she told herself in a hoarse whisper, not loud enough for anyone to hear. ‘Just shut up.’ Fear would not help her right now, so she shut it away for the time being. She plucked her way over to Freya and Jasper. ‘Have you guys seen Marlow?’ They shook their heads.

‘Marlow Woden?’ said a voice. Honora looked over and saw Coral Gideon, a witch in her mid-thirties, looking grim. ‘He’s the reason we’re down here. He set off the alarm, that is, before he was—’

‘What?’ Honora breathed. ‘What are you saying?’

‘I heard the First talking about it to the Aurors. Marlow went above-ground, last night...why he did, I’m not sure...but that’s when he saw them. Dementors, a swarm. They found us, somehow. He alerted the guards but —’

‘No!’ Fear swooped back in, and Honora felt her heart clench in alarm. ‘They didn’t, er, they didn’t *kiss* him...did they?’ her voice squeaked out, sounding for all the world like a terrified five-year old. She looked over at her grandmother, as if for comfort. Eleanor Weasley was

looking at her with sympathy, grief, and something else. Was it disapproval?

‘I think they did,’ Coral said. ‘I’m so sorry, Honora. I know that you and he were – meant for each other.’

Honora turned away wordlessly. She could not believe it. Marlow? The same boy who had professed his love to her the night before? And she had told him to ‘get some air’. She felt suddenly numb. It could not be. It was not possible. Why would Marlow have done something so stupid, and gone aboveground, into the night?

Because he was heartbroken, and intoxicated, said a voice in her head. *But he should have known better,* the same voice continued. Honora sank down to the floor and crossed her legs. With chill horror she realised that with the Dementor’s kiss, even Marlow’s soul had been lost. It was terrible thing to have had happen, and it was her fault. Honora wondered briefly if she should feel guilty or responsible, and wondered why she felt neither of those things. Only an impersonal sadness and, she thought woefully, a sense of relief that it had not been her, to be kissed by a Dementor.

Eleanor Weasley slowly lowered herself down to sit next to her granddaughter.

‘Honora,’ she said gently. ‘What happened last night?’

‘I- I can’t remember, exactly,’ Honora lied.

Eleanor pulled out her wand. ‘*Legilimens*,’ she whispered.

With a nasty jolt, Honora felt her grandmother crawling through her mind, her memories. Honora and Freya, six years old and playing with wizard’s marbles on the floor of the common hall...Honora successfully transfiguring a chair into a gopher on her first try, with a yelp of triumph...Honora and Marlow kissing, no, wait – she slammed her mind closed. ‘What are you *doing*?’ she hissed at her grandmother.

‘Seeing if you’re telling the truth,’ Eleanor stated brusquely. ‘Who’s been teaching you Occlumency?’

‘Julius Talbot,’ Honora said. It was true; the elderly First Wizard had taken a further hand in Honora’s studies when it became clear she had enormous potential. It was well-known that the Dark Lord’s interrogators used Legilimency with regularity. ‘And if you want the truth, fine. I started it. We had the firewhisky, and we were just talking and having fun, and then Marlow walked me back to our door. He- he confessed how much he felt for me, but I couldn’t really think straight so I told him to go to bed. I thought that he did,’ Honora finished, omitting the part of the story where she had told Marlow to go outside. ‘That was all.’

‘Foolish girl!’ Eleanor scolded. ‘You were leading that boy on. I can see it, plain as day. Now listen hard, Honora,’ she continued. ‘This is not a game. This is not a joke. You are still acting as a child, in these times of grave danger. I know you are not satisfied or entirely happy here in Polaris—’ Eleanor held up a hand as Honora tried to protest this ‘—but you take things entirely too lightly.’

‘And how is that my fault?’ Honora felt herself getting angry. ‘There is nothing fun here, nothing new, nothing to *do* with myself. Can you blame me?’

‘No, I can’t blame you,’ Eleanor said, a little more gently. ‘But you must realize something. I fear, especially now, that the Dark Lord’s forces are hemming us in. Drawing closer. We are losing our centuries-old battle, Honora.’

At that moment, First Wizard Julius Talbot, the greatest wizard in Polaris, burst in the dungeon door. A few startled shrieks greeted him, but died off when the citizens saw his face.

Julius was burning with anger. His normally laid-back and kind manner was gone; instead he was radiating power and urgency. ‘The Dementors are breaking through the outer defences,’ he announced to the terrified crowd. ‘We haven’t much time. I can take off the Apparition wards, but it will allow the Dementors in. I have reason to believe Death Eaters are straight behind them. There is only one solution.’ Several others nodded. ‘I will remove the wards in ten seconds. It will buy us minutes, at the very most. Parents, gather your children for side-along Apparition. We go to Centurion.’ Julius brought

out his wand, and with a wave a number 10 glowed in the air. It turned into a 9...8...7...

Honora turned to her grandmother, eyes wide. 'Grandmother? Where is Centurion?'

'I know where it is. You'll side-along with me.' Eleanor got out her own wand. She took Honora's arm firmly in her grasp. 'Ready?'

Honora nodded.

The countdown read 3...2...1...the air filled with cracks and pops as the inhabitants of Polaris disappeared. Honora felt a squeezing, like through a tube, highly unpleasant. Just when she thought she was going to suffocate, the squeezing sensation let up and she found herself standing in a pine forest grove, surrounded by most everyone else from Polaris.

The air was cold, but then most places on Earth were cold these days. At least there was no snow on the ground. Honora looked around slowly. Tall, bare tree trunks stretched upward, capped by dull green pine branches. The trees stretched as far as the eye could see, fading to grey. The forest appeared deserted, and yet...it felt like something was watching them. She gripped her wand tightly.

With one last popping noise, Julius Talbot Apparated. He swirled around, counting heads. Seemingly satisfied, he walked out of the group and into the forest.

'Where's he going?' Freya whispered. Honora shrugged in response. She was in slight shock, and she knew it. Losing one of her best friends to Dementors, leaving Polaris, every possession and memory swept away...it was all Honora could do not to break down and start screaming. Instead, found a cold core of strength in herself, and that was all she could focus on. It may have been slightly twisted, but standing there, in an unknown forest, Honora actually started to feel a little burn of excitement.

She had never been off the island of Polaris her entire life. She had barely been allowed outside, to see the light of day. Now, everything was changing so fast and hard and it made Honora breathless.

With keen youthful ears, she picked up a sound in the forest. It sounded like hooves. Peering her head through the trees, she made out the figure of Julius Talbot with...Honora blinked several times to confirm...a centaur! A bona fide centaur! She tugged on her grandmother's sleeve.

'Look, look! I thought they were all gone,' Honora whispered to Eleanor.

'Not all, just most,' Eleanor said with a nod. 'We are at their last stronghold, far in the forests of Siberia. I'm not sure why Julius brought us here, but he must have had his reasons.'

We'll find out soon enough, Honora thought.

The centaur was very intimidating. He had black hair and a roughened expression, dark eyes darting around disdainfully at the human intruders. Beside the centaur, Julius looked war-weary and pale; it was understandable, considering his Shadow Kingdom had fallen to the Dark Lord just moments before.

A hush fell over the group of shell-shocked refugees as Julius cleared his throat. The black-haired centaur stood back, lips pressed together in judgmental silence.

A waver cracked through the First Wizard's voice, as he spoke to his people. 'I have requested asylum here, in Centurion. I'm afraid the centaurs have yet to decide on our status; I will appear at their herd's council to speak for us. If we are denied asylum, we will have to disperse to the other Shadow Kingdoms as best we can.' His words hung heavy in the air. Julius bowed, apparently having nothing more to say, and turned to follow the centaur back through the trees.

The citizens of Polaris looked around at each other gravely, some muttering in low tones of trepidation.

Their fate would be decided by the centaurs.

Chapter 3

Safe Haven

When Julius Talbot disappeared with the gruff centaur, Honora started to worry. She knew what dispersion meant; she would never see most of the people from Polaris ever again. It meant separation from her friends, and there was no guarantee that they would even reach the other Shadow Kingdoms safely. Lord Voldemort's secret police monitored everything, from the Floo Networks to the Apparition records. Besides, if Polaris had been found, it was likely that other Kingdoms had been discovered, as well.

A morbid image flitted through her head of herself, caught by the Dark Lord's forces, tortured, Crucio-ed, starved, given to the Dementors as her soul was sucked out and gone forever...Honora shook off the gloomy thoughts with effort. She would rather turn to the Dark side than let something that bad happen to her.

Her grandmother whispered to her quickly about the centaurs' general dismissal of humans. 'They are unlikely to want to get involved in our problems,' Eleanor said, her voice sounding old and hopeless. 'Only if there are a few decent ones in their midst do we even stand a chance.'

Honora felt tightly wound, and ill at the whole situation. It was desperately unfair that she, a witch just entering her prime, should face such a dismal future. In all likelihood, they would have to leave this momentary safety, and go to some unknown and dangerous place. It was out of anyone's control, and if there was one thing she hated, it was losing control.

I won't let it affect me. I won't! She clenched her fists, and closed her eyes. She was Honora Crowley, the last of the Weasley line. Yes, now she had lost someone, a dear friend. Yes, she had been ripped away from the safety of her home. But she was still fiercely innocent, herself. She vowed there and then to stay happy, and do what *she* wanted, which was get out of this terrible situation somehow.

Honora was suddenly sick to death of the people around her, even her own grandmother, with their depressing attitudes and sense of

noble despair. Honora did not care about them or what they thought. She wanted life, and a good life at that. Just because most the world was dark...who cares? *She* was light.

With a surge of power, Honora felt her ambition to light the world rise up like a snarling beast inside her. She wanted to *defeat* Voldemort. And she could not fool herself – she wanted it for herself, not for the sake of these scared people around her.

To be great, to be revered, to rise to the ultimate challenge and take it by the horns and wrestle it to the ground...Honora nearly growled out loud in anticipation. *Is it insane to want to rule the world, but in a good way?* she wondered briefly. The way she had been raised, ambition was like a bad word. Everything in the Shadow Kingdoms was done selflessly, for the safety of others. Honora would much rather take care of herself first.

She shrugged to herself in the cold. It did not matter. Sure, she wanted glory. But if that meant freedom and happiness for everyone else at the same time, how could it be bad? With a frown, she decided that no matter what new events crashed upon her, she was going to let this be an opportunity, not a disaster.

In those moments, waiting in an alien forest to hear her fate, Honora started to grow up.

A rustling whisper swept through the group. Julius Talbot was back, along with the first centaur Honora had seen, and another one that appeared to be a female. He introduced them as Bane and Morrigan, leaders of Centurion.

The centaur, Bane, appeared at the head of the group. He looked to be in an ill temper, and his nose crinkled in apparent disgust with having to work with mere humans. The fair lady centaur next to him, Morrigan, seemed more approachable. She whispered something to Julius, and he nodded.

‘Citizens of Polaris,’ Julius began. ‘The centaurs have welcomed us to their last grove, Centurion.’ A palpable wave of relief washed through the crowd; Honora felt hope lift inside her. ‘Here we will stay until other Shadow Kingdoms can be notified of our plight. Their

leader, the venerable Bane—‘ Julius nodded at him ‘—and Morrigan now have some things to say.’

Bane stepped forward. ‘We centaurs rarely take a hand in human affairs. However, even now we can see the entire world will freeze in darkness unless steps are taken. The centaurs are dying out, our herds dispersing. The Dark Lord has sent many dark creatures after us, yes, indeed...but he has not defeated us yet. You, remaining humans, and we, remaining centaurs, are some of the last free creatures left on the planet. I will expect you to behave accordingly, with dignity and respect and quiet, if you wish to be under our temporary protection here at Centurion.’ He glared at the crowd of people sternly.

‘Additionally,’ broke in Morrigan. ‘We have told your First Wizard of Polaris, Julius Talbot, about what we feel is necessary. It is a drastic step, but we have foreseen it in the stars. It is the only way.’

Honora’s brow furrowed at this. Morrigan was sounding a bit coy and vague. She wondered what the ‘drastic step’ would be.

Morrigan continued, ‘If everyone will please follow me, I will show you to your tents. You must rest tonight, and the morning will bring what it brings.’

Honora stepped forward, holding onto her grandmother’s arm. ‘Can we trust the centaurs?’ she whispered in a low tone. ‘They haven’t told us what we are really doing here. What if it is a trap?’

Eleanor Weasley looked at her granddaughter with some respect. ‘Suspicion! And vigilance! Your grandfather would be proud of you.’ Honora quirked her mouth in a smile of pride. ‘But, no. Julius Talbot is too good a wizard to be fooled into a trap. I think the centaurs have probably told him the whole story, if not the rest of us. The real question is, how did the Death Eaters find out about Polaris?’

Honora thought about this for a moment. ‘We were betrayed,’ she concluded. ‘Someone who knew its location told the Dark side. Or perhaps another of the Shadow Kingdoms has been taken over, and they got the location from there,’ she suggested.

‘Very good. I had reached the same conclusion,’ Eleanor said. ‘Here, we’ve reached the tents. We must rest now.’

‘All right,’ Honora agreed. She was very tired, now that she thought about it. She went into the sparsely-appointed white canvastent and sank down onto a cot, falling asleep nearly instantly. In her dreamless slumber, she kept her wand tightly in her fingers.

Awaking at dawn the next morning, Honora slipped out of the tent into the chill light. She was still wearing her white birthday dress, and was grateful she had thought to bring her furs. With a quick cleansing charm, she took care of her toilette and wandered out into the forest. She leaned up against an old pine and just stared into the trees for awhile. This was all new to her; being outside, not underground; everything suddenly topsy-turvy. She liked it, just a little bit.

A snap of a twig behind her caused Honora to whirl around, wand brandished. She relaxed when she saw Freya. Her best friend did not look well.

‘Freya,’ Honora said. ‘Come here.’

‘I just don’t know what to do,’ Freya said tearfully. ‘Marlow—I just can’t believe he’s gone.’

‘I know,’ Honora said, pulling Freya into a hug. ‘It’s terrible.’

‘And for you most of all,’ Freya sobbed. ‘I mean, you were going to marry him, weren’t you?’

‘Er...’ Honora did not want to say anything one way or the other. She probably would have married Marlow Woden, but she would not have been very enthusiastic about it. She kept silent instead of saying something that would have sounded disrespectful to poor Marlow’s memory.

‘If it had been Jasper...’ Freya sniffled and pulled away. ‘What are we going to do now? Where do we go?’

Honora looked at Freya for a moment, and then gazed up toward the treetops. 'Anywhere,' she whispered. She shivered with excitement. Freya took it for fear, and clasped Honora's hand.

'Come on. Your grandmother is up, I saw her talking to the First.'

Back at their tented refugee camp, more people were awake. Most looked sad, frightened, shocked: pale scared faces, prematurely aging. People huddled together for a semblance of sanity and order.

Eleanor Weasley-Demetrius gestured for Honora to come over. 'Dear, I need you to gather Freya, Jasper, and Lithia. You four are the only ones who qualify.'

'Qualify for what?' Honora asked. Julius Talbot, at Eleanor's side, looked at Honora appraisingly, and shook his head slightly.

'You will see. You have a meeting with the centaurs in an hour,' he said.

Honora looked at him oddly, but Julius just turned away.

She conjured some toast and tea for her remaining friends. The morning got slightly brighter, but not much. The sky past the trees was grey and bleak. Even the forest was colourless; washed out by the waves of cold wind breezing through it. As Freya, Jasper, and Lithia finished their breakfast with Honora, Julius Talbot appeared before them, looking more serious than Honora had ever seen him. Her grandmother Eleanor was with him.

'The centaurs have requested your presence now. All of you,' he said to the group.

They all looked at each other with worried expressions. Honora got up, brushing crumbs off her lap. She had to admit, centaurs were intimidating creatures. She was not entirely sure she wanted business with them. They did not care for humans or their troubles, and Honora was positive they would not hesitate to brush humans aside for their own plans.

However, there was no choice at the moment. She and the others from Polaris were stranded, at the mercy of these creatures. *What do the centaurs want with four seventeen-year-olds?* Honora thought to herself. She was sure it could not be good, whatever it was.

Swallowing her fear, she stood and grasped Freya's hand as they followed the First Wizard through the trees.

Chapter 4

Fool's Journey

Honora, along with Lithia, Freya, and Jasper, gave each other puzzled looks as they followed Julius Talbot through the forest. They could not imagine why the centaurs would want only them. However, Julius was silent and Honora's grandmother Eleanor looked equally reticent.

Finally they came into a small clearing. In the centre was a flat stone dais, raised several inches above the forest floor. To one side of the dais, a cracked stone pedestal stood, holding up a large and worn-looking book. Morrigan the centaur stepped forward, her white-blond hair shimmering. Bane was behind her, still scowling.

'Young ones,' she began. 'We centaurs read the stars. One of you has a great destiny.'

Honora started paying keen attention.

'The Dark magic of Voldemort has affected the world, greatly. We see that there is not much time left, for all living creatures on Earth. Death is descending. And yet, a sliver of hope remains. For our long history, we centaurs have been the diviners of the stars. We see what was, and what will be. And now, we see an opportunity.' Morrigan turned to Bane, who continued the speech.

'Next week, there will appear an exceedingly rare planetary alignment,' he said. 'One that will open up a crack in time itself. If we take advantage of this, there could be a way to save *our* world.' Bane seemed loathe to admit that he did share a planet with human beings.

'A crack in time...' Honora whispered. She started to smile. This was getting interesting.

'We estimate that the crack will open up for a few minutes only. We must be prepared to send someone through it,' Morrigan explained.

Feeling brave, Honora stepped forward. 'Excuse me,' she said. Morrigan nodded as Eleanor Weasley watched her granddaughter with sharp eyes. 'Where does this crack in time lead?'

Morrigan's silver eyes glittered. 'The alignment corresponds with the eleventh of August, of the year 1943.'

Honora stepped back, confused. What good could that do? If it were really to help, the crack should have gone back to Harry Potter's time, in the 1990s, when it all went wrong in the first place.

'Thus,' Bane's deep, scary voice said, 'you must choose among yourselves which of you wants to go.'

Julius elaborated. 'Whoever goes back will be attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,' he said. An involuntary shudder went through the company at the mention of Lord Voldemort's headquarters. 'There is...something else.' He looked reluctant. 'Whoever goes back will be unable to return. This is a one-way journey; only the alignment allows it to be possible in the first place.'

The gravity of the situation began to sink in. 'Does one of us have to go?' Freya asked, sounding hesitant.

'It is our only choice,' replied Morrigan. 'So, yes, it must be one, and only one, of your group. The alignment occurs and the crack appears here, in this clearing, in one week's time. One of you must go.'

Honora thought rapidly. 1943! So long ago! She felt an urge inside her, powerful and uncontrollable. She wanted to go. She wanted to get away from this cold, dying, imprisoned world. She wanted a future for herself. In the past, maybe she could become so powerful as to stop Lord Voldemort before he even started.

Before any of her other friends could claim it, Honora stepped forward. 'I volunteer to go,' she announced. Julius nodded at her. Her grandmother looked unsurprised.

'And the rest of you?' Morrigan asked. 'Is this your decision, to send Honora?'

The others looked at each other silently. 'Well,' began Lithia, 'I don't know...Honora is the best witch, I suppose.'

'No!' said Freya. 'I don't want you to go! First we lose Marlow, now you?'

Honora saw an opening. 'It's—it's because of Marlow that I *should* go!' she said, putting tears into her voice. 'I want to avenge him, his loss has hurt me so much...I have nothing left here for me,' she finished in a hoarse whisper, attempting to sound heartbroken rather than thrilled.

Only Eleanor noticed the ploy. 'Clever girl,' she whispered to herself, unheard by anyone else.

'It is decided,' Bane growled, apparently fed up. 'Julius, it is up to you to educate her on what she needs to know. I must ask you humans to retreat now.' He turned away.

Honora felt peculiar as she walked away between Julius and her grandmother. All of a sudden, she was leaving her own world forever. Her emotional state kept splitting itself between ecstatic anticipation and dread fear. Most of all, she knew that there was no choice involved; for her, it was the only escape from an unspeakable future.

Her training was undertaken immediately, under the supervision of Julius Talbot, as usual. The large book that the centaurs had in the clearing, as it turned out, was an historical account of the Last War.

Julius explained that Honora should read the entire thing, no small task as the book was at least two thousand pages long.

'This is a direct account of the rise of the Dark Lord, as related by Minerva McGonagall, the last headmaster of Hogwarts School. She wrote down everything that happened, from Voldemort's beginnings to the time of her own death at the age of ninety, shortly after the defeat of the Order of the Phoenix. I suggest you study it well.'

Honora did. The story was interesting as well, populated with her own Weasley ancestors and full of high drama. She learned about Harry Potter, and his tragic end. Most interestingly, she read about

Voldemort himself: the magical transformations he undertook, his use of Horcruxes to guarantee his own immortality, his school days. This latter was the most important, Honora could see immediately.

Voldemort was born under the name Tom Marvolo Riddle, according to McGonagall. He was a student at Hogwarts itself, beginning in the year 1938. Honora recognised that she would be in that time. Tom Riddle had shown himself bad from an early age. McGonagall took many of her tales from the Pensieve of the great wizard Albus Dumbledore, who remembered many things about Tom Riddle.

Honora learned that Voldemort was the heir of Salazar Slytherin, one of the founders of Hogwarts. He was a half-blood, raised in a Muggle orphanage. This surprised her, and she wondered if he was mistreated there. Perhaps that would explain his hatred of all things Muggle. He had murdered his own father and grandparents in the summer of 1943, directly before the time when Honora should appear from the future.

Other than those basic facts and timeline, however, there was very little about Voldemort's character or day-to-day life. McGonagall had been some years older, and only remembered Voldemort in his school days as a clean-cut, quiet, powerful wizard in Slytherin house.

In addition to McGonagall's book, Honora was briefed on the world history of the time. The Muggles were embroiled in a great war, although it did not compare to the Last War. A Dark wizard came out of Germany named Grindelwald, who seemed to be part of the problem. Julius Talbot suggested they use this as an excuse for her appearance, and Honora laughed with delight at the brilliance of the idea.

'Yes!' she agreed. 'I have been in hiding from Grindelwald because my family opposed him. That's good.' She loved making up stories.

'And it will immediately win the sympathy of Albus Dumbledore, a powerful and good ally to have,' Julius added.

The week passed by exceedingly quickly. Freya grew more morose all the time at the prospect of losing her best friend forever. Jasper

tried to comfort her by saying they would name their first-born daughter after Honora. This only made Freya cry all the more.

‘It’s all right,’ Honora assured her. ‘This is what I want. I’m excited to go, I want to do my part.’ It was true. The world of 1943 was so free compared to her dim existence in 2112. She would have so many things to see and do and become. It was her old dream, come to life, of having limitless opportunity.

The night before the alignment, Eleanor Weasley sat down with her granddaughter in their tent. Both women were subdued; Honora knew she would miss her grandmother most of all.

‘Honora. You are growing into an amazing witch. I only wish I could be there to see you reach your full potential.’ Eleanor put a hand on Honora’s cheek. ‘You burn so brightly, dear.’

Honora just looked at her, uncharacteristically sombre.

‘There are a few things I must tell you, though. My last words of advice. You may not heed them now, but promise me you will at least remember it.’ Honora nodded in affirmation. ‘Right. You must not underestimate the seriousness of the situation. I know why you want to do this. You want adventure, and glory, to prove yourself. That is a good thing! But don’t let yourself get distracted from your task. Fix the situation with the Dark Lord first, and then become whoever it is you want to become.’

Honora nodded again. She did need to take this thing seriously, even if she was so light-hearted in nature.

‘And one more thing. Do not underestimate Voldemort, er, Tom Riddle. He was exceedingly dangerous, even then. If he gets an inkling of what you are about, he will kill you. Do you understand?’

‘Yes,’ Honora whispered.

‘Do what you need to do, but don’t act rashly. Keep in mind that you will be in that time, in that world, for the rest of your life. In those days, there were strict laws governing magic. You cannot just ‘get rid’ of Riddle. You must be cunning about it. Remember he is still

considered an innocent by those around him, even if you know better. He is an upstanding student and by McGonagall's account was well-loved by his teachers. Whatever you do to stop him, you must live with.'

Honora gulped. She had not even thought about that. She had considered just cursing him into oblivion the moment she saw him, just getting it over and done with. Now, she saw that would not work. A sudden stab of fear went through her, as she contemplated meeting the real Lord Voldemort, young and able and very hostile.

In her head, in front of the mirror, she had rehearsed a confrontation with Voldemort many times. In her fantasies, she was always a powerful white witch, a queen of incomparable power, and made Voldemort fall at her feet. Now, her reality would be taking on the responsibility of defeating the most powerful wizard in history, and saving the entire planet from death and darkness...all as a clueless and under-prepared seventeen year-old.

Eleanor grasped her hand. 'Oh, don't worry, my dear Honora. You will be brilliant. Lately as I've been watching you, I've reassessed my evaluation of which Hogwarts house you could be in – I would say that with the way you wrap the unsuspecting around your little finger, you could easily pass for a Slytherin.'

'Really?' Honora did not know whether to feel proud or insulted. She opted for proud. After all, she could not believe that ambition by itself was not a bad thing. It was from the Crowley side, she knew; the ancient pure-blood family was famous for their ambition and creativity. Most Crowley children had gone to magical school in Egypt, but the few that had ended up in Hogwarts had invariably been Slytherins.

'Be careful, walk slowly at first, and do not make any rash moves,' advised Eleanor. 'It is better to learn your way around first, then you can do what you will do. Although don't wait too long; Tom Riddle will be getting stronger by the day.'

'What will happen to you, grandmother? What will happen here, when I do kill Riddle and change what happens in the past?'

Eleanor sighed. 'This future will be altered,' she admitted. 'I may not exist. Everything will be different. But at this point, we are all willing to sacrifice ourselves for a better future for the whole of the world. Even as we speak, Voldemort's forces are closing in on the Shadow Kingdoms. It seems he has tired of us, finally. There is no other choice.'

'But what if I alter something back in 1943, to make myself not exist here and now?'

'You probably will do that,' Eleanor said. 'I highly doubt you will exist here, if you accomplish your mission. But since you went back to that time, your 1943 self will continue. Julius explained it; the centaurs seem to understand the whole thing even if we humans don't.' She laughed shortly. 'I'm happy for you, Honora. This is a thing worthy of you, of your heritage. What's more, I think you are actually looking forward to it, aren't you?'

'Yes,' Honora confessed. Then she broke into a grin, shaking off her worries. 'I'm going to have fun with this!'

Eleanor smiled. 'Get some sleep, now. Tomorrow is a big day.'

Honora did not sleep much, that last night in 2112, and bolted up from a doze when the first rays of light filtered into the tent. She had many things to remember. She had been taught Apparition that week, learning it 'indecently' quickly, according to Julius. The crack in time would open in 1943, but she would still be in the middle of Siberia. It was most inconvenient. Thus, Honora would have to Apparate herself to a secluded part of a place in London called Hyde Park, then find her way to Diagon Alley.

She still had only her wand and her furs as possessions. She hoped her long white dress would not attract too much attention until she could get some new clothes. The centaurs had given her a large bag full of gold pieces they called Galleons. They told her it should be enough to keep her supplied for the two years she would be a student at Hogwarts.

Honora looked into the mirror in her tent as she gathered her things. Her dark auburn hair fell around her shoulders, looking a bit scraggly

after a week of living in the woods. It had a natural wave to it that turned into a tangled mess if she wasn't careful. Dark brows arched over her pale blue eyes. Honora was usually very satisfied with her appearance, to the point of vanity.

It seems unfair that I should be beautiful as well as clever, she thought with a smirk. Then she put a hand over her mouth as she realised how full of herself she could be, and giggled. To fix the problem, she made a weird face at herself in the mirror, scrunching her nose and wagging her tongue between her teeth. The sight made her giggle harder.

'Honora?' Eleanor said, sticking her head in the tent. 'It's time to go. And why are you making faces at yourself?'

Honora turned sheepishly. 'Sorry, Grandmother, I was just, um, psyching myself up.'

Eleanor shook her head and turned away so that Honora could not see the expression of pain on her face. She was going to miss her crazy granddaughter, that was certain. The girl could light up a room, not just with her beauty but her spirited sense of fun. Eleanor could see much of the Weasleys in her, that irrepressible spirit. She could also see the Crowleys, the ancient pure-blood line creating a thirst for power. It was a volatile combination in a barely seventeen-year old girl.

Outside her tent, Honora said goodbye to her friends. They were more like family; they were the only people she had ever known. The remaining citizens of Polaris gathered around her to wish her luck and say goodbye. Honora even felt herself tearing up a little at the prospect of leaving them. Just because she was excited to go did not mean she would not miss her childhood home and all its kind residents.

Freya clung to her, sobbing, and Jasper gave her a warm hug as well. Honora was nearly crushed to death by Lithia, who then slapped her hard on the back in a gesture of solidarity.

'Promise me you all will be careful, be safe, and remember me,' Honora said to her friends.

‘We will,’ Jasper said, clasping Freya’s hand. ‘You’ll always be in our hearts, Honora.’

‘We could never forget you,’ Freya added. ‘You’ll be wonderful, back in 1943. I know it,’ she ground her chin confidently, even though she was crying.

‘Okay, well, I have to go,’ Honora said. She blew a kiss to the crowd as she walked away with her grandmother toward the centaur’s clearing. Looking back, she saw faint stirrings of hope in an otherwise hopeless group of people. They were last ones, the only free people left, and Honora felt a deep, cold apprehension for the world in general. Life really was ending, for everyone. Suddenly she felt the weight on her shoulders for the first time. If she did not succeed, chances were all these people, and everyone else in the Shadow Kingdoms, would be hunted down and killed. It would be the end of all things.

Through the bland pine forest she walked with Eleanor. They reached the clearing too soon, and found a large group of centaurs standing around in a circle. The strange beasts parted for them, and Honora did her best to put on a brave face.

‘Is she ready?’ Bane growled to Julius Talbot.

‘Yes, she is ready,’ he answered in the affirmative.

‘The alignment will begin in ten minutes,’ Morrigan announced. ‘Honora, Eleanor, you may wish to say goodbye.’

This was the hardest of all. Eleanor Weasley-Demetrius was the only parent Honora had ever known. They hugged and kissed and soon tears were streaming down both of their cheeks.

Eleanor pressed something into Honora’s hand. She looked at it: it was a large, heavy seashell-shaped gold locket. Clicking it open, Honora saw a detailed, beautiful family tree glowing inside, with faces of her family smiling up at her. Her parents, Adaire and Felix; and their ancestors, back to the Weasleys on her mother’s side and the Crowleys on her father’s.

‘Whenever you lose heart, think of us,’ Eleanor whispered. ‘Think of your family. And all of those who might not be lost when you succeed in your task.’ With bony hands she pressed the locket shut and closed Honora’s hands around it. ‘I love you, darling granddaughter.’

‘I love you, too, Grandmother,’ Honora said, not quite able to keep a sob out of her voice.

‘It has started,’ Bane interrupted. ‘Look.’ He pointed at the centre of the clearing. Directly above the raised stone, a bright white crack was opening up. It glowed with unimaginable brilliance, filling the clearing with white-purple light. A strange, thrumming sound filled the air, like growling rapids in a river, or teeth gnashing together. It felt unnatural, disconcerting. ‘Step up, girl,’ Bane ordered her.

Honora walked towards it, hesitantly. She shook hands with Julius, who whispered ‘Good luck, Honora.’ She glanced at Morrigan, the only centaur with a good attitude.

Morrigan looked back at her. ‘Don’t worry, child. You will only die for an instant.’

‘Only WHAT?’ Honora burst. ‘Die?’

‘Was it not explained to you?’

Honora shook her head furiously.

‘Oh, dear. Well, when you step through the crack, your body will be destroyed. We are not sure what happens in the meantime, but we do know that on the other side, your body and everything on your person will be reassembled. Don’t worry. It’s like Apparition, just a bit...different.’

‘Great,’ Honora muttered. ‘Well, here goes nothing.’ She stepped toward the light, which had now increased to a door-sized portal. She glanced at her grandmother and Julius, who each waved at her. She smiled weakly. Not wanting to lose her nerve, she stepped forward.

‘Now!’ Bane fairly shouted the order, ‘Now! Before it closes!’

Honora took a deep breath and stepped into the light.

Chapter 5

Magus

Pain, burning, so intense she could not stand it. Her body broke, shattered, was eaten by the maw in time that gobbled her up and disintegrated her.

Then a sudden calm, floating, no more feeling. Everything went black.

A tiny pinprick of light in the distance. A tunnel, bringing her closer, and closer...whizzing by, there were people there, thousands of them, millions of them.

Perfect love and perfect trust. Something great was near, she was swept up into light and life...Honora knew in that moment that there was a great world beyond the veil of death. Beauty enveloped her, a great brilliant light that hugged her close with ultimate love. It was so warm and wonderful that she did not want to leave...

And then darkness once more. A crack. Pins and needles all over. She could feel her limbs again, and her cheek pressed up against a soft bed of pine needles.

Honora's eyes blinked open. At first, everything was out of focus. She groaned and tried to move her fingers, her toes. Gradually, she pushed herself up onto her hands and knees. She looked around; yes, she was in the forest clearing. But there were no centaurs, or humans for that matter. She was entirely alone.

She sat on the ground for several moments, contemplating what had just happened to her. She had died, and experienced death, and it was not all that bad...but now her soul was back in a reconstructed body, breathing and blinking.

Shaking her head of its cobwebs, Honora stood up uncertainly. She checked her wand (still intact) and her locket (unbroken) and her bag of Galleons (all there). The air was not cold, and this surprised Honora until she remembered that it was late summer in 1943.

'1943,' she said out loud. 'I'm back in time.' Glancing around once more, she broke into an exultant laugh. 'I'm back in time!' She spun on her heels, and pinched herself once to be sure it was real.

'Okay. Time to get down to business.' She brought out her wand and prepared to Apparate to London. *Hyde Park, Hyde Park, Hyde Park, London*, she focused as hard as she could. '*Apparate!*' she commanded. There was that squeezing into a tube again, and then Honora saw new trees and new grass. She stepped into a breezy, warm, sunny day in London, England.

Grinning in self-appreciation, Honora took a few steps out of the trees that concealed her. There were a few people around, but not many. They wore very peculiar clothes. *Must be a Muggle thing*, she thought. Honora walked east through the picturesque park, passing a large silver lake, until she came to a street lined with stately white homes facing the trees. Several people stared at her curiously. She must look strange in her white dress, she concluded. Best to find Diagon Alley right away.

She could hardly take her wand out to point her in the right direction, so instead Honora wandered through the streets of London. She walked through a very posh area, and then got into what was clearly the heart of the city. Honora took it all in with glowing, amazed eyes. She could not believe there were so many *people* all in one place, a vast and bustling city. The architecture was so interesting, white and clean, with beautifully ornamented iron fences. Now and then she could tell the older buildings by their worn grey stones, majestic and timeless. Honora fervently wished that she could explore Muggle London more fully.

Reaching a cross-roads called 'Picadilly', she kept heading east until she reached a square with trees and benches. A sign said it was called 'Leicester Square.' She had just passed through the square when an alarming noise started, sending people running through the streets. It filled Honora's ears with screeching emergency and she looked around frantically.

What was going on? People were disappearing into a tunnel marked 'Underground.' A man in a cap yelled in her face, 'What are you waiting for, lady? Get inside! Don't you know there's a war on?'

Honora heard a droning sound in the air and looked up. Great metal birds were swooping through the sky. She saw things dropping from them...and then she understood. The Muggle war was going on, and these must be their weapons. She had better find her way to a safe place.

She ran until she reached a street called Charing Cross Road, and turned right. People were still running, and then she heard a series of loud booms that sounded like explosions. They were not far away. Honora was at a loss as to what to do. Had she come back in time just to be blown up by Muggles?

Then she saw something that filled her with relief. A man in a long black coat was running down the street, holding what was unmistakably an owl. *He must be a wizard!* Honora realised. She ran after him, following him into a pub marked 'The Leaky Cauldron.' She stepped inside with a snap of the door and all was calm.

Several witches and wizards were sitting around old wooden tables, drinking or chatting or reading. Only a few glanced up at the girl in the white dress. Catching her ragged breath, Honora tried to remember all her briefings as to what she needed to do.

With remarkable presence of mind, Honora found the proprietor and booked a room at the Leaky Cauldron to stay until the term started at Hogwarts. She sent an owl to then-Professor Albus Dumbledore, explaining that she was a war refugee with no formal magical training, but was at sixth-year level. She went shopping on Diagon Alley and bought a functional wardrobe. She went to a hairstylist, and got her hair cut and styled appropriately for the 1940s. Wart, the barman at the Leaky Cauldron, was very helpful, and answered all her silly and odd questions with equanimity.

An owl came for her a few days later from Professor Dumbledore. Honora scanned the note carefully.

'Dear Miss Crowley,

You must have had a terrible plight in Europe. We at Hogwarts will do everything we can to help you. I have spoken with the headmaster, Armando Dippet, and he is most willing to offer you a place at our institution.

Since you have no formal magical training, I will visit Diagon Alley the week before term begins and test your abilities. We can then place you into the appropriate level at Hogwarts. Until then, please stay safe in London.

Yours most respectfully,

Professor Albus Dumbledore.'

Honora smiled in satisfaction. Everything was coming together.

A few weeks later, she was beginning to feel very comfortable in Diagon Alley. She was a fast learner, and took her grandmother's advice to heart. Her lack of formal magical education and 'refugee' story did a lot to explain her curiosity, and Honora had made friends with some of the shopkeepers in Diagon Alley as well as the staff at the Leaky Cauldron. With delight, she discovered things like Bertie Botts Every Flavour Beans and Chocolate Frogs, novelties that had long disappeared in the gloom of the future.

There were so many witches and wizards everywhere, so many things to see, that Honora felt compelled to explore it all. It was exhilarating. There was a scope here that she was simply not used to. Polaris was tiny in comparison.

Professor Dumbledore appeared on the 28th of August. He sought her out at the Leaky Cauldron, and Honora nervously walked down the stairs, aware she was about to meet one of the greatest wizards of all time. She need not have been nervous, however; the bearded Professor Dumbledore was very nice to her and had a twinkle in his kind blue eyes that reminded Honora powerfully of Julius Talbot.

'So, Miss Crowley,' he began after they had finished butterbeers, 'There are a series of tests I must put you through. You are how old, exactly?'

‘Er, just seventeen, sir. My birthday was...August 11,’ Honora said in a burst of inspiration. It was the day she had appeared in this time. According to her locket, it was also the birthday of the famous Ginevra Weasley, the love of Harry Potter’s life.

‘I see. Well, you should be in sixth year, then. At Hogwarts, we administer the Ordinary Wizarding Levels, or OWLs, at the end of fifth year. I’ll start there; if you pass that level then I think sixth year is the place for you.’

Honora nodded. She felt confident she would pass OWLs, and she was right. When Dumbledore administered the tests, he was particularly impressed when she put up non-verbal defence shields and even produced a non-verbal Patronus charm. Honora was a little surprised at Dumbledore’s reaction; in her time, everyone learned non-verbal defence. It was a matter of survival. However, it was to be expected that magic would evolve a little against a foe such as Lord Voldemort. Honora just mumbled that her father was a very powerful wizard and it must have rubbed off on her.

‘Well, Miss Crowley,’ Dumbledore brushed his hands together, ‘that settles that. You are more than competent to become a student at Hogwarts, and I offer you a most sincere welcome.’ He smiled at her, eyes glittering with good will.

Honora stood up and shook his hand, grinning. ‘Thank you very much, sir.’

Dumbledore produced her letter of acceptance out of thin air and a list of her books. ‘The train leaves Kings Cross at 11 am on the 1st of September,’ he informed her. ‘And I shall see you at Hogwarts. You will be sorted into your house along with the new first years at the opening feast.’

‘Okay! Thank you, sir.’ Honora accepted the letter and bid Dumbledore farewell.

Four days later, she woke up in her room at the Leaky Cauldron and carefully got dressed. She put on her new stockings, low-heeled black shoes, white blouse, grey jumper, black skirt. She left her

uniform robes in her trunk; she would put them on when the train approached Hogwarts.

Hogwarts. Honora still had to tell herself it was just a school, not the Dark Lord's headquarters. It was difficult to overrule a lifetime of fear of a place like that. With a swish of her wand, she packed her trunk and levitated it down the stairs. Honora was glad Kings Cross station was not too far away. Muggle London was not safe, as her first day attested.

At Kings Cross, she wandered along between platforms 9, and 10, rather unsure of what to do, until she saw someone with a similar trunk walk through a brick wall and disappear. She deduced it had to be the entrance to Platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$. She followed the next person who did it and was immediately overwhelmed. Gleaming in red and gold glory was a steam train marked 'Hogwarts Express.' The platform was crowded with witches and wizards, of all ages. Parents hugged their children, older students gathered together in groups, reunited after the summer holidays.

Glancing around for Tom Riddle, Honora realised that she had absolutely no idea what he looked like. She had not been briefed on his appearance, and she could hardly expect him to be wearing a sign saying 'Future Dark Lord.' All she knew was that he was a Slytherin. She would just have to keep her eyes and ears open, that was all.

Taking a deep breath for courage, Honora pulled her trunk along and levitated it into an empty compartment toward the rear of the train. The cacophony around her did nothing to calm her nerves. She was scared and nervous and excited all at once. Honora hoped that the compartments were not pre-assigned, and that she was not taking anyone's place.

She sat down on the seat closest to the window, and waited. The clock read 10:52. Stragglers made their way onto the train, but no one bothered Honora in her compartment. She wondered why no one was sitting with her, then shrugged as she crossed her legs and leaned against her armrest.

One final whistle from the train, and a group of younger students burst into the compartment.

‘Oh, sorry, can we sit here? All the others are full,’ said a fair-haired girl.

‘Sure, of course,’ Honora nodded.

‘Thanks!’ These students looked to be about three years younger than Honora. Besides asking her name, they occupied themselves with a game called Exploding Snap and Honora took the opportunity to gaze out the window as the train picked up speed, heading north out of London.

When the terrain started getting rough and mountainous, and the sun was low in the sky, a girl with a crest on her robes stuck her head in the compartment. ‘We’re nearly there,’ she said. ‘Time to put your robes on.’ The third-years scrambled, and Honora carefully put her black robes over her outfit, sitting back down with her hands clasped in her lap.

She looked up, and immediately caught eyes with a tall boy with a green and silver tie passing through the train’s corridor. A shiver went down her spine. The boy had black hair and looked vaguely familiar to Honora. She saw his eyebrows come together for a split second in puzzlement when he saw her.

Get used to it, Honora thought. I have a feeling I’m going to cause quite the stir, being the new girl.

For all her nervousness, Honora loved the looks of Hogwarts so far. It was magnificent, glittering in all its towers, and her ride across the lake was memorable, even if it was with screaming little first years. Professor Dumbledore met them at the door, and pulled her aside for a moment.

‘The headmaster is going to announce that we have a new student after the first years have been sorted,’ he explained. ‘Then you can be sorted and join your new house.’

Honora could only nod.

‘You aren’t frightened, are you?’ he asked her, looking concerned and bemused all at once.

‘Oh, no, not a bit!’ Honora lied openly, then grinned at him. Dumbledore could tell she was scared witless, he did not need to ask her.

‘All right, then. Don’t worry, you’re not the first transfer student we’ve had. Two joined us last year. In a time of war like this, it is not uncommon.’

That made Honora feel slightly better.

Honora waited in the shadows in a room off the Great Hall, and she heard silence descend as Headmaster Dippet (she assumed) announced that a new sixth-year would be joining them.

‘Honora Crowley!’

Hearing her name, Honora stepped into the Great Hall. She held her head high, determined to look cool and collected. She smiled briefly at Dumbledore, and shook hands with Headmaster Dippet, a short, portly man with a careless air.

Whispers went through the assembled students. New students were always interesting. Honora could feel herself being judged and the Sorting Hat was not even on her head yet.

‘Please sit, Miss Crowley,’ Dippet gestured at a stool, and Honora obeyed.

She felt him place the Sorting Hat on her head and she bit her lip, waiting.

‘*Oh my, oh my,*’ the hat said. ‘*The future evolution of magic, indeed. So many things at once. There is the Weasley bravery, oh yes, don’t think I am fooled, I know what it took for you to come here.*’ Honora raised her eyebrows at this; she hoped the hat would not tell anyone. ‘*And ambition, burning in your heart, a flame, crawling out of darkness. But where to put you? Gryffindor and Slytherin blood do not mix well...so you must be somewhere in the middle...*’

Honora could see people glancing at each other. It seemed the hat was taking longer than usual with her.

'I must put you somewhere, clever girl, so let it be...RAVENCLAW!'

Honora breathed a sigh of relief. At least it was not Hufflepuff. She sat up, smiled, and walked down the steps to join the Ravenclaws, who were all applauding her.

A/N: I love reviews! So take a minute and tell me what you thought...thanks a million!

Chapter 6

Perception

Honora sat down at the Ravenclaw table between two girls her age, who scooted apart to make room for her.

‘Welcome to Hogwarts!’ said a girl with blonde hair and sharp brown eyes. Aside from the eyes, she looked a lot like Freya. It put a wrench in Honora’s heart. ‘My name is Damaris Turpin, I’m one of the sixth-year Ravenclaw prefects. And this is Kay St. John,’ she pointed around Honora at the girl on her other side, a pretty brunette with blue eyes.

‘Honora Crowley,’ she replied. ‘It’s nice to meet both of you.’

‘So, Honora,’ Kay said, leaning on her elbow, ‘what brings you to Hogwarts?’

‘Well...’ Honora paused for the appropriate tragic effect. It was not difficult, since it was not far from the truth. ‘I’ve actually never had a proper education. My family has been in hiding from Grindelwald’s forces in Austria,’ she explained. ‘We had to stay, erm, underground, basically. They found my family, but I managed to escape. Professor Dumbledore helped me get started here.’

‘Wow, I’m sorry about your family,’ said Damaris. ‘How difficult.’

‘Thanks,’ said Honora. ‘I’m just glad to be out of danger.’

Kay and Damaris nodded with understanding. ‘Your name, Crowley,’ said Damaris, ‘is that like Aleister Crowley? The famous alchemist?’

Honora nodded. It was true, after all; the Crowleys were an old magic line. ‘The same. Different branch of the family.’

‘I’m pure-blood too,’ said Damaris. ‘And Kay is Muggle-born.’

‘Really?’ Honora turned to Kay curiously. She had never met a Muggle-born witch; in her time they were all killed before they

reached the age of eleven. Kay mistook her interest for ill judgement, however.

‘So what of it?’ Kay said, casting her eyes down.

‘It’s good, really! It’s just—um—I don’t know many Muggle-borns. I think you’re really interesting!’ Honora enthused.

‘Oh!’ Kay smiled back at that. ‘Well, anything you ever want to know about the Muggle world, I would be happy to tell you.’

Honora grinned at her new friends. If she had to live in this world forever, she wanted to be popular in it. She was introduced to some of the other Ravenclaw sixth-years: a well-muscled boy named Lawrence Carter who was the Quidditch captain, along with the Seeker, a slight but tall fair-haired boy named Ashley Wynn, called Ash.

As she chatted with the Ravenclaws, Honora glanced over at the Slytherin table next to them. The tall black-haired boy from the train was sitting there, looking at her with dark eyes. She held his gaze for a moment, then prettily turned her face away, conscious that his eyes were still on her.

The girls showed her to her dormitory in Ravenclaw Tower later that night and Honora’s head was spinning with excitement at her new home. The door was guarded with a portrait of an Arabian wizard on a flying carpet, who winked at her when she said the password. Honora could see she would fit in with the other Ravenclaws and kept up with their fast banter. She loved her four-poster bed, decorated in luxurious blue and bronze. The round common room was a dream, too, with its dark blue velvet sofas and copper accents. It was more luxurious than Honora could have imagined after living her life in a rough-hewn refuge like Polaris.

She had gotten her schedule from Professor Drakkis, the Arithmancy teacher and Ravenclaw head of house. Glancing over the parchment, Honora saw she would be taking NEWT-level Potions, Defence Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Arithmancy, Divination, Charms, and Transfiguration. That should be enough to keep her busy. She had also arranged private flying lessons with Jahn, the Quidditch

referee. None of the other students would believe her if she said she had never been on a broom in her life, so Honora would have to catch up fast.

The first day of classes, Honora proudly wore her Ravenclaw crest that had appeared on her school robes. She had double Potions first thing in the morning. The Potions Master, Professor Slughorn, greeted the class jovially as they filed in the classroom. Four samples of potions were present, filling the air with interesting smells.

‘Greetings, greetings, class,’ Slughorn boomed. His blonde mustache seemed to bristle. ‘Welcome to NEWT Potions. You are all the best in your respective houses to have made Potions OWLs, so expect this year to take you above and beyond the skills you have developed thus far.’ He smiled benevolently at a group of Slytherins in the corner. Honora thought Slughorn liked the sound of his own voice quite a lot.

‘Now, class. I have prepared four samples of very difficult potions, just out of interest. Who can identify them for me? We start with this clear one here by my Slytherins,’ Slughorn pointed to a cauldron full of a crystal clear, odourless liquid. ‘Anyone?’

‘Veritaserum, sir,’ said a male voice.

‘Good, good, m’boy!’ Slughorn intoned, pleased. ‘Ten points to Slytherin. And what does Veritaserum do?’

‘It forces a person to tell the absolute truth for up to five minutes,’ the young man said, sounding bored. Honora turned to see who the Potions star was and recognised the same handsome dark-haired Slytherin she had noticed on the train, and in the Great Hall.

‘And this one?’ Slughorn asked his student. He answered again, correctly identifying Polyjuice Potion.

‘Who is that?’ Honora hissed to Kay, referring to the Slytherin genius.

‘Oh. Tom Riddle.’ Honora felt her stomach twist in fear as Kay continued. ‘He’s by far the cleverest boy in school. Slughorn worships him. It’s not good to even think about besting him, even if we are Ravenclaws.’

Honora nodded. Tom Riddle, then. Her target. The person she was sent back to kill. She did not know what she had been expecting him to look like, but she had not anticipated that he would be so normal, indeed so good-looking.

‘And this?’ Slughorn continued, pointing to the cauldron on Honora’s table.

‘Amortentia, sir,’ Tom Riddle said, ‘the world’s most potent love potion. It smells of whatever attracts a person.’

Interested in this last, Honora leaned forward toward the cauldron. She smelled sticky toffee pudding, and a sort of fresh pine forest smell, and some other scents she could not quite identify. It was intoxicating. She wondered what Riddle smelled in Amortentia. *Probably power and evil and death*, she thought cynically.

She snapped her attention back to class as Slughorn indicated the last potion, a small cauldron full of jumping gold. Honora smiled. She knew what this was; her father, Felix, had been named after it.

‘And this last. Anyone?’ Slughorn smiled, already turning toward Riddle’s table for his answer... Until Honora’s hand shot up into the air.

The movement attracted Slughorn’s attention and his bushy blonde eyebrows raised in surprise. ‘Our new student seems to know the answer. Yes, Miss Crowley?’

‘That is Felix Felicis, sir. Bottled luck. A full dose creates a perfect day for whoever takes it. Everything seems to go right, and extraordinarily lucky coincidences can be expected to occur.’

Slughorn brought his hands together in a clap. ‘Very good, Miss Crowley! I see you were not misplaced in Ravenclaw. Fifteen points,’ he nodded to her. Honora gave him a charming smile. She could feel Tom Riddle looking at her from the corner. *Probably annoyed that I got the answer*, Honora thought.

The Felix Felicis potion would go to whoever brewed the best Draught of Living Death potion that day, and Honora, Lawrence, and

Kay all got to work. Potions was not Honora's best subject, but it was not her worst, either. She brewed a very decent Draught, but in the end the Felix Felicis went to Tom Riddle, of course.

Honora avoided looking at him when they left the classroom and instead linked arms with Kay and talked about hairstyles.

The rest of the first day's classes went well, for the most part, and Honora was relieved to discover that she was not behind her classmates in magical training. In fact, she stood out in Arithmancy and Defence Against the Dark Arts. Excellence in DADA was to be expected, of course; in 2112 Defence had evolved highly within the Shadow Kingdoms. If it had not, they would all be dead, victims of Lord Voldemort.

Honora had surprised Professor Merrythought by performing an exceedingly powerful non-verbal shielding spell, *Protego Maxima*. It was actually invented by Honora's own great-grandfather, Tutmos Crowley, and could protect against even Unforgivable curses for up to thirty seconds. Honora did not mention this property; she merely said it was enhanced version of the *Protego* spell.

Tom Riddle had given her a hard stare after she demonstrated that spell.

Other than unwanted eye contact with frightening Heirs of Slytherin, it did not take Honora long to fall in love with Hogwarts. It was wonderful enough attending the legendary school with so many learning opportunities and a vast library. In addition, Honora became fast friends with Damaris and Kay, her house-mates and room-mates, and several of the Ravenclaw boys. Although there were school rules and curfews, Honora had more freedom of movement at Hogwarts than she had ever known in her life.

And then there was Hogsmeade. The first Hogsmeade weekend fell in October, and Honora got to wear normal clothes (skirt and blouse and long coat) and go *shopping*. She loved shopping from her time in Diagon Alley, and spent carefully with her Galleons, but was able to pick up loads of toffee fudge and Chocolate Frogs from Honeydukes, as well as a new set of quills in the Ravenclaw colours. She found

herself at the centre of a raucous, cheerful group of fellow sixth-years at the Three Broomsticks pub later in the day, drinking hot butterbeer.

Relations between Ravenclaw and all the other houses were generally good, although the Slytherins were always problematic. The younger Slytherins were all right, but the older ones mostly belonged to Tom Riddle's clique. They had a certain dark glamour about them and the other students gave them wide berth. The Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs, however, had several nice students and it was a mix of houses at Honora's table in the Three Broomsticks.

Wedge between Ash and Damaris, Honora finished her second butterbeer and took the opportunity to taste some of her toffee fudge. The table was full of the latest gossip; Lawrence had recently broken up with his Slytherin girlfriend after a row, and was asking the table for light-hearted suggestions on how to avoid her hexes.

'Hex her first,' suggested Frank Finnigan, one of the Gryffindors.

'Or wear an invisibility cloak for the rest of the year,' said Kay.

'How about Honora's little enhanced *Protego*? That was pretty nice work,' said Lawrence. 'You should have seen Merrythought's face, he was duly impressed.'

'Thanks!' Honora said, grinning gaily at Lawrence. 'But / think you should try to make amends with her. She's probably feeling lonely...you could offer to put up advertisements around the school to find her another boyfriend!' Laughter greeted this suggestion.

'I think Lawrence is the only boy in school brave enough to date a Slytherin,' added Damaris.

'Yeah, you should have been in Gryffindor, mate,' said Frank. 'Then you'd at least be on a winning Quidditch team!'

'Ooooh!' resounded around the table. 'Challenge!' someone called.

'Now, now,' said Lawrence. 'We'll just see about that. I'm captain this year, and I could hardly call myself a Ravenclaw if I didn't have a few clever tricks up my sleeve.'

This instigated a round of bets taken on who would win their first match. Honora supported Ravenclaw, of course, but not enough to bet on it. She did not understand Quidditch and went to matches for the social opportunity (and, she had to admit, Lawrence Carter looked awfully good in Quidditch robes).

Glancing over at the door, Honora saw a group of Slytherins walk in, Tom Riddle amongst them. A small quiet descended over the pub when they entered, and then the noise picked back up again when the group sat down at a table. Honora decided it was time to gather more information.

‘What’s with that Tom Riddle, anyway?’ Honora asked Lawrence. ‘He seems, um, intimidating.’

‘Yeah, he’s a fine Quidditch player, though,’ Lawrence replied. ‘But you’re right, there’s something about him that’s a little off. Can’t say what it is, exactly.’

Damaris overheard their conversation and added another interesting tidbit. ‘I’m sure he’ll be Head Boy next year,’ she said. ‘After all, he got that special award for services to the school last year. He’s awfully clean-cut, for a Slytherin. I mean, after all that happened back in June...’ she shook her head. ‘Who would have guessed that a third-year would be behind it all? Rubeus Hagrid was his name, right?’

‘Yes,’ Lawrence said. ‘Although none of us are very clear on what happened.’

‘What are you all talking about?’ Honora asked, pretending to be in the dark. She knew perfectly well what they were talking about: as the Heir of Slytherin, Tom Riddle had already opened the Chamber of Secrets and set a basilisk loose on the school, resulting in the death of a girl.

‘Oh, it was terrible,’ said Damaris. ‘A monster was loose in the school, and a Hufflepuff girl named Myrtle died. They almost closed Hogwarts, until Riddle discovered that Hagrid was keeping the monster. They expelled Hagrid, and Riddle got the award. Although, Dumbledore

kept Hagrid around. He works on the grounds now. I hardly ever see him.'

'Hmm,' said Honora. *What a devious little thing you are, Riddle*, she thought to herself. 'What was the monster?'

'We were never told the specifics,' said Lawrence. 'And school adjourned too soon for any more information to spread. For all that Tom Riddle is a bit creepy, he has to be somewhat of a good guy to solve the problem and keep the school open.'

Damaris nodded her head in agreement. 'He'll make a good Head Boy,' she said.

'How are the Head Boy and Head Girl chosen?' Honora asked.

'It's whoever has the highest marks in their class,' Lawrence explained. 'Along with qualities of leadership and responsibility. Naturally, Ravenclaws make up an unfair percentage of Heads,' he finished with a grin.

'Naturally,' said Honora. A plan was beginning to form in her mind. What if she became Head Girl next year? That would give her good access to Tom Riddle. She would have plenty of time and opportunity to take him down, and even make it look like some sort of unfortunate accident. Of course, Dippet would probably choose someone who had been at Hogwarts the entire time, someone who was already a prefect. But if Honora worked hard enough, distinguished herself as a leader...it could work. She was going to have to turn the charm on old Dippet.

She cackled gleefully to herself, causing Lawrence and Damaris to look at her. 'Uh, too much toffee,' she explained. But inside her own thoughts, she resolved to become Head Girl, no matter what it took.

Chapter 7

Birth of a Strategy

As the first term wore on, Honora was increasingly glad for the extra tutelage Julius Talbot had given her back in Polaris. Honora was towards the top of all of her classes. This was evidenced in November, when Professor Slughorn detained her after Potions class.

‘Dear, dear Miss Crowley,’ he said, resting his hands on his protuberant belly as he relaxed in his chair. ‘You are of the Aleister Crowley line, are you not?’

Honora nodded.

‘Good, good. And quite a hand at Potions! Albus Dumbledore tells me you are just as brilliant in his Transfiguration class.’

‘I, um...’ Honora looked at her feet. She was exceedingly proud of herself for her marks, but she made sure to keep a humble appearance in front of her professors. ‘Thank you,’ she finally said.

‘I’m having a little get-together of some of my finest and most promising students on Friday evening. Dinner, drinks, good conversation...I do hope you can make it.’

‘I would be delighted, Professor Slughorn!’ Honora raised her eyes and gave him a dazzling smile.

‘Excellent! My quarters at seven on Friday evening, then. I believe your Ravenclaw friend Damaris is coming, as well. Good family, the Turpins, her uncle Vasily is high up in the Ministry...’ Slughorn said.

‘I’ll see you on Friday, then, Professor,’ Honora said, making her exit with a slight curtsy. She did not mean to curtsy, but Slughorn seemed to make it appropriate.

Later, Honora asked Damaris about Slughorn’s dinner party.

‘Oh, yes, the Slug Club. I was wondering when he was going to get around to inviting you. He surrounds himself with anyone who has potential...magic, or social climbing, or both,’ Damaris laughed. ‘And you’re beautiful, as well. It’s no wonder.’

‘I see,’ said Honora. ‘What am I supposed to wear, then?’

‘I usually dress to impress on those occasions. Not because it’s required, but it makes my Potions grade go up. Slughorn likes to feel that he’s surrounded by important and elegant people. Quite entertaining, and if you just flatter his ego a little bit, he can make life easier for you. The dinners are fun, actually.’

‘Good,’ Honora said, ‘we can show up together!’

Friday evening rolled around, and Honora set her dark red hair in flattering waves and put on some makeup for the Slug Club. She loved getting dressed up, and she and Damaris danced around their dormitory room getting ready. Kay rolled her eyes at them as she worked on a Herbology essay. It was so refreshing to have new clothes, and Honora was getting into the fashions of the 1940s. She wore one of her only nice garments, a dark blue dress with small light blue polka dots and a matching belt, and pearl earrings. She touched her family tree locket for luck as she put on her pearls; they reminded her of her grandmother.

Slughorn’s quarters were decorated like a tent, with blue and green and silver panels and a rather garish gold chandelier hanging from the ceiling. Honora and Damaris walked in, laughing, and gave sly little waves to the people at the table they already knew. There was Nestor Nicodemus, the Hufflepuff whose father was the Greek Minister of Magic, and a friendly Gryffindor girl named Portia Whimsey.

Honora’s eyes flicked over the room and she saw Tom Riddle standing in a corner with two other Slytherin boys. The skinny one with the hooked nose was called Avery, she knew; the other she was not sure of. Honora noticed that Riddle was wearing a large, rather clunky gold ring with a black stone in it. He stood with serene confidence, intimidating and authoritative.

Squaring her shoulders, Honora vowed to take this room by storm. 'Professor Slughorn!' she said with the smile still on her face. 'Damaris and I have arrived.'

'Miss Crowley and Miss Turpin, what a pleasure. You both look high and mighty indeed...boys, you'd better watch out for these two!' Slughorn chuckled at himself and gestured for them to sit down. 'Now as soon as Miss True and Mr. Herrera arrive, we can begin.'

As he said the words, the door opened again and two more students walked in.

'Brilliant! Shall we sit?' Slughorn gestured to the long table.

Honora sat down and was disconcerted to find herself directly across from Tom Riddle. *I will NOT be afraid, I will NOT be afraid*, she told herself sternly. It was hard to remember that Riddle had not made the transformation to Lord Voldemort quite yet, although from the sounds of it he was getting close. Honora raised her eyes to squarely meet Riddle's.

Close up, she saw that his eyes were a deep blue colour, so dark they were nearly purple. They were expressionless. Instead of glaring, Honora made herself smile innocently at him. To her surprise, Riddle smiled back. It would have been charming had the smile reached his eyes.

'Honora Crowley,' Riddle said, inclining his head in acknowledgment of her.

'And you are...?' Honora raised her eyebrows haughtily, pretending to be ignorant of his identity.

'Tom Riddle,' he replied, in a conversational voice as smooth as silk. 'It's nice to meet you. I hope you're finding Hogwarts enjoyable.'

His overwhelming politeness made Honora feel boorish at her reaction to him. 'Yes,' she said with a blush, forcing her mouth into a courteous smile. 'It's been wonderful so far. Thank you for your concern.'

Riddle nodded at her, apparently finished with the pleasantries, and turned away toward his Slytherin pal on his left.

Slughorn began the dinner with a long-winded toast. The various courses were delightful, as was the conversation. At least half of the Slug Club was there because of their academic prowess. The other half, who merely had familial connections, usually had good chat, at least. The talk turned to cutting-edge magical theories. Nestor Nicodemus mentioned that his father had spoken of new theories of Divination coming about after the re-discovery of the Oracle of Delphi.

'I should have a chat with Kaige about it,' Nestor said, referring to the Divination teacher.

'Personally, I find Divination a bore,' said Avery the Slytherin. Honora did not like his manner. 'Who can tell the future, anyway?'

'Perhaps the future is only a probability,' said Honora, deciding to speak up and add to the discussion. 'There may be a strong chance that something will happen, but only if someone does not actively change it.'

'Interesting,' Portia Whimsey said. 'Free will or fate? I believe in free will.'

'And the rest of you?' Slughorn said, following the conversation with beady eyes darting around. 'Tom, what do you think?'

'The best wizard makes his own fate,' Tom Riddle said.

'Oh, but interference can come in the most unexpected ways,' Honora said boldly. Laughter bubbled behind her eyes. 'Sometimes a wizard does something with a certain intention, but it all goes wrong.'

Riddle raised one sceptical eyebrow at her. 'Such as?' he said.

Honora realised she had no idea what she was talking about. *Speaking too soon...trying to get attention again*, she mentally scolded herself. 'Such as...' she paused awkwardly. Not knowing what else to do, she made something up. 'My grandmother told me a story of a very powerful Egyptian wizard long ago. He attempted a

spell that would guarantee his own invincibility.' Honora levelled her gaze on Riddle. 'And the spell went...*horribly* awry.'

'Awry how?' Riddle asked calmly. She could tell his interest was piqued. Fortunately Honora was good at make-believe stories.

'He charmed a crystal, which he put on an un-removable gold necklace. When he wore the necklace, no one could touch him, or harm him in any way. It made him essentially immortal to danger,' Honora said. She had been told a fairy tale story like this as a child; not a word of it was true, but that did not matter, as long as she could make her point.

'Then, something happened he did not count on. He was on a wizard's ship, sailing from Egypt to Rome, and got into a duel. In the course of the duel, he lost his wand, went overboard, and sank to the bottom of an undersea chasm, due to the heavy weight of the crystal. However, because of the necklace, he could not drown...but without his wand, he had no way to reach the surface again. He remains there, bored, alone, and lost forever, in the deep cold.' Honora finished her story with a sip of wine. 'And *that*, Tom Riddle, was unexpected.'

Riddle stared at her with narrowed eyes, looking slightly taken aback. The rest of the table was silent until Slughorn broke in.

'Well, what an extraordinary story, Miss Crowley! A lesson to all of us, shall we say? Now, Miss Whimsey, was that fate or free will for that poor Egyptian wizard?'

'It was his free will to try to be invincible,' said Portia. 'So it was his fault!'

The debate continued into the night, but Riddle did not say anything more.

That night, as Honora was getting ready for bed, she reflected on Tom Riddle/Lord Voldemort. Things were not going very well; she hardly knew him at all. She still did not know how far along he had come in turning truly evil. He had already opened the Chamber of Secrets. And, according to McGonagall's book, Tom had already

killed his father and grandparents that past summer. He was a murderer. But had he split his soul into pieces yet?

Also according to the book, the large black-and-gold ring Riddle wore had belonged to his mother's family. He had stolen it off his uncle, Morfin Gaunt, at the same time he killed his relatives. The worst case scenario was that he already had made Horcruxes out of both his diary and Slytherin's ring. The best case scenario was that he was a mere triple-murderer and thief, but had not yet housed his soul in inanimate objects.

Honora sighed. There had to be a way to kill Tom Riddle and come out of it smelling like a rose. The problem was, Honora was not sure she was capable of producing a Killing Curse. There was always poison, but that was near impossible at Hogwarts. Everyone ate in the Great Hall. *Besides, Riddle probably has one of his little Slytherins taste his food for him.* She knew for a fact Riddle would not be so stupid as to consume an anonymous gift of food without testing it first. Maybe if she was Head Girl, she would have better access. *But then I might be the only person with an opportunity to murder him. I would be an automatic suspect.*

As it was, Honora was merely the 'new girl'; everyone knew her name, but she had not yet distinguished herself as outstanding. It was all very perplexing, and one thing was for certain: Honora needed to get closer to Riddle, and to do that, she needed to be Head Girl.

Honora fell asleep quickly the night after the Slug Club, with her mind overworked and anxious. The next morning in Transfiguration, she was absentmindedly turning a yellow canary into a pumpkin and back again when a brilliant idea hit her. A do-good, get-attention-for-herself, leadership and initiative brilliant idea. She felt as though a spontaneous torch had flared on inside her mind, solving her problems.

'Kay. Damaris.' She turned to her friends. 'I have a genius plan.'

Damaris laughed at her, brown eyes twinkling. 'And what is that?'

'We have to hear it to believe it,' Kay added.

‘What would you think about a wizard’s charity ball? All benefits to a scholarship fund for wizard orphans. We could have dancing, and an auction, and all kinds of things!’ Honora whispered frantically, her eyes flashing with excitement. It was contagious.

Damaris and Kay lit up. ‘A ball! What a good idea!’ Damaris whispered back.

‘And for orphans,’ Kay said, ‘like yourself.’

‘Let’s talk about it at lunchtime, then! Before Dumbledore takes points,’ said Damaris. Honora nodded in agreement. Professor Dumbledore was always nice and helpful to her, even if he did favour the Gryffindors a bit. However, he took points from people who did not pay attention.

Honora sat back, smiling to herself with satisfaction. This was it. She would be famously popular at Hogwarts if she could pull off a fabulous social event. And the professors would be eating out of her hand if she made it a charity function. At lunch, Honora explained her idea in more detail to a rapt group of Ravenclaws. As she spoke, she got clearer in her own mind as to what she wanted; Honora was a verbal person and talking things out always helped.

‘So. I suggest we hold the ball at the beginning of next term...say, Valentine’s Day!’ Excited nods all around. ‘Let’s see...what should we call it...’ The other Ravenclaws stared at Honora. It was as though the gears whirring in her head were visible. ‘How about the Salvation Ball?’

‘That’s good,’ said Kay.

‘And...OH!’ Honora exclaimed loudly. ‘Since it’s on Valentines...we can have the *girls* ask the *boys* as dates! Reverse, like!’

‘YES!’ Lawrence and Ash said at once. The boys seemed much more enthusiastic all of a sudden.

‘We could decorate using red poppies,’ Kay suggested, ‘like Remembrance Day, from the First World War.’ Others looked at her blankly. ‘Muggle war, everyone.’

‘Oh!’ collectively.

‘Poppies are good,’ Damaris agreed. ‘They’re one of my favourite flowers.’

Honora grinned. ‘Right. I’m going to Dippet as soon as possible, and try to set up a meeting for the prefects.’

Headmaster Dippet was easy to convince. Honora appeared at his office with her over-prepared proposal, ready to say all kinds of things to convince Dippet of its merits. However, once she got into his large, bland office, Dippet had merely listened for a moment.

‘Very well, Miss Crowley, it sounds fine and good. I put you in charge. Have anyone you want for the committee, and be sure to send me a permission form for the Great Hall at least a month before the event.’ He had waved her off with one pudgy hand, saying he had many important things to attend to. Honora suspected he just did not want to be too bothered, which was fine by her.

Damaris suggested that Honora start by presenting her idea for the dance at the next prefect’s meeting. After speaking with the Head Boy, Court Aiken (a Ravenclaw, naturally), Honora was given permission to speak to the prefects. She thought out the details the night before, lying on her stomach in her dormitory, chewing on the end of her quill.

The red-and-white themed Salvation Ball, would, as Kay suggested, be decorated with poppies. Honora had in her mind a field of snow, covered with red poppy petals. Tragic and beautiful, all at once. She wanted to avoid hearts and romance, even if was on Valentine’s Day; the charity scholarship was a serious topic in itself.

The floor of the Great Hall would be covered in white fog, the ceiling charmed as a sky full of red and white stars. Garlands of poppies would be strung, as well as a wishing-fountain with floating flowers. Tickets would be sold, and an auction of some kind, all for a scholarship fund to supply magical orphans with a full education at Hogwarts. Of course, to make things more light-hearted, it was a ‘girls ask the boys’ dance.

With a whoosh of horror, Honora realised that if girls had to find dates for the ball, that meant *she* would have to find a date for herself. 'Damn,' she muttered to herself. She had not considered that. Who in the world was she going to take? Lawrence Carter would probably go with her, and he was tall and strapping and a Quidditch captain to boot. However, she also thought maybe she had an obligation to get to know Tom Riddle better.

Honora shivered involuntarily at the thought of spending the evening as Lord Voldemort's date. It made her feel cold and flushed at the same time. Tom Riddle was evil *and* attractive. It was very unsettling. Besides, Tom would probably decline her invitation. He was so handsome that half the girls in school would want to go with him. Most likely that seductive Slytherin girl, Olive Hornby, would ask him straight away.

'Bah,' Honora said out loud. 'Who cares, anyway. I'd rather stay away from him and enjoy my evening, thank you very much.'

The Salvation Ball idea was accepted with much enthusiasm at the prefect's meeting; everyone loved a dance. Damaris was on the committee, of course, along with the three other Ravenclaw prefects. Two Hufflepuffs and three Gryffindors (including Portia Whimsey from the Slug Club) added their names. Then, to Honora's surprise, Tom Riddle spoke up.

'Count me in,' he said, smiling pleasantly.

She ducked her head as she wrote Riddle's name down, so as to hide her expression of triumph. Slytherins were not known for charitable instincts, yet her idea had intrigued Riddle enough to make him volunteer. He would have no choice but to get to know her, perchance even trust her... Everything was going according to plan. She remembered from her briefing (so far long ago, so far in the future) that Riddle himself had grown up in the orphanage. He'd taken the bait and now she could keep a good eye on him. Her mouth twisted in a smile; oh, how she was clever.

It was decided that Honora and Damaris would sit at a table during the lunch hour for the next few days, signing up anyone else who wanted to be on the committee. In all, the idea was tremendously

popular. Honora felt like she had clouds beneath her feet, so proud of herself was she. It felt good to be making waves at Hogwarts.

As she gathered her things after the meeting, she felt someone standing in front of her. She looked up; it was Riddle.

‘Why are you really doing this, Crowley?’ he asked quietly. ‘Getting popularity points from the teachers?’

Honora scowled at him. Of course, that was exactly what she was doing. However, she was not about to tell him that. ‘I am an orphan myself, Riddle. I know what it’s like, and I think it’s only fair I use my good fortune to try to help others like me.’

A strange expression flickered across his face. ‘You’re an orphan?’

‘Yes.’ It was the truth, after all. ‘My parents were killed, in Europe. I myself have been a refugee until this year, when Professor Dumbledore was kind enough to help me.’

‘Oh, yes, Dumbledore. He is quite the do-gooder, isn’t he.’ Riddle looked like he had a bad taste in his mouth.

Honora decided to bait him with a little sarcasm. ‘Well, I suppose you have a wonderful family and perfect life, so I guess you couldn’t possibly understand about being an orphan,’ she said, narrowing her eyes at him. Waiting to see what he would tell her.

She was not disappointed. A flash of anger crossed Riddle’s normally calm features. ‘That’s how much you know,’ he spat. ‘Try growing up in a dirty *Muggle* orphanage.’

Honora felt a little frightened. She did not want to deal with an angry future Dark Lord. She ploughed ahead in spite of herself. ‘What do you mean? Your parents are dead, too?’

‘My mother—’ he stopped. ‘Yes. My parents are dead.’ Riddle absently twirled the black ring on his finger, then composed his face once more. ‘I’ll help with the publicity,’ he said, gesturing down at Honora’s scattered parchment. ‘You know, tickets and the like.’ He started for the door.

‘Oh...okay,’ Honora said. ‘Riddle?’ He turned. ‘Thank you.’

Riddle did not respond, and left the room with a swish of his black robes.

Chapter 9

Allure

With no future Dark Lord to spy on, Honora spent a lot of time reading during the Christmas holidays. Soon she was several weeks ahead in her classes, and even attempted to understand some of the things in Herbology that had always confused her. When Damaris and Kay returned in January, Honora felt refreshed, revitalized, and ready to take on the school, again.

Damaris had learned some cunning beauty charms over the holidays from her Aunt Lucinda, and the girls determined to use them before the ball. 'The prefect's bathroom will be perfect,' said Damaris. 'We can use the tub for the mud bath, and the sauna for the skin-wrap, and then exfoliation, then dip...'

'I don't know what you're talking about, but it sounds painful,' said Kay.

'Beauty is pain,' intoned Honora, philosophically.

'Maybe we can get the house-elves to give us manicures and pedicures!' Damaris suggested.

'No!' Kay looked shocked. 'I don't want a house-elf with nail varnish anywhere near me, thank you!' Honora and Damaris laughed. 'But now, girls, the real question is...who will we ask to the ball? It's already January!' Kay said more seriously.

'Do you think Lawrence Carter would say yes if I asked him?' Damaris asked. 'He's so handsome.'

'I think he would!' Kay replied. 'You two would look very nice together.'

Honora did not say anything at first. She wished Damaris had not mentioned Lawrence; now she, Honora, could hardly go asking him. It was disappointing. Honora seemed to be trapping herself into asking Tom Riddle to the dance. The idea was not as intimidating as it would have been four months ago; she and Riddle were on polite

terms, acknowledged one another in the halls, settled into the safety of acquaintanceship borne from the same classes, the same ball committee. It made him seem less offensive.

‘Lawrence would be a good one for you, Damaris,’ Honora said reluctantly. ‘He would.’

‘Now I just have to work up the nerve!’ Damaris giggled. ‘How about you two?’

‘I thought I would ask John Parrish,’ said Kay. ‘You know, the Hufflepuff Seeker.’

‘Oooh, he’s cute,’ said Honora. ‘I bet he would be honoured to go with a gorgeous Ravenclaw.’

‘And what about you, Honora? Who have you set your sights on?’ Damaris asked.

‘I honestly don’t know,’ Honora replied. ‘I’ll, uh, think about it later.’

She avoided thinking about her potential date for several weeks. She knew what she should do, but procrastinated asking Tom Riddle, and when the last Friday in January rolled around, it was time for the final official meeting of the Salvation Ball committee. It was all coming together well. The Hufflepuffs in charge of food had concocted an elegant menu; Honora glanced over it approvingly. Butterfly shrimp, cocktail-sized apple chicken sausages, samosas...shortbread cookies, cherry ices, and strawberry tarts...it made Honora hungry just thinking about it. Red punch would be served, along with the usual butterbeer, pumpkin juice, and plum wine.

The tickets had gone on sale right after the holidays, open to all students fourth-year and above. Nearly everyone had purchased tickets. With the food and beverages supplied by the school, and the Great Hall free, it looked they were going to make a nice profit. A famous wizarding swing-time band, the Floating Strings, had been hired for the dance music, at a much reduced cost since the charity aspect was good for the band’s publicity.

Arrangements were made for the silent auction. Quality Quidditch Supplies of London had donated a top-of-the-line Comet 101 broom, expected to be popular with the boys. There was also an exquisite piece of sculpture: a floating model of the solar system made of pure gold, found in an Egyptian tomb and donated by Nestor Nicodemus's father. Other, smaller items included a specially-brewed custom perfume by 'Scentsations of Diagon Alley' and a set of tarot cards that had once belonged to a Divination professor at Hogwarts.

Honora announced the lists for decoration helpers, including the multitude of Quidditch-boy volunteers. She also passed along the news from Dumbledore that anyone helping set up decorations would be awarded five house points each.

'That should get the Slytherins out and helping,' Damaris joked.

The meeting adjourned with everyone clear as to their jobs, and psyched up for Hogwarts' biggest social event in years. And Honora still did not have a date. She noticed Tom Riddle giving an order to the only other Slytherin on the committee, a fifth-year non-prefect girl named April Gaius, and then he gathered his folder to leave. With her heart in her throat, Honora walked up to Tom as casually as she could.

It was wrong that someone so despicable could be so attractive.

'Er, Riddle,' she said. 'So the tickets are almost gone?'

'That's what I said,' Tom replied coolly.

'Good, good...' Honora clenched her fist behind her back. This was not going well. 'So, who asked you to be their date?'

Tom's dark blue eyes looked straight into her, as if he knew exactly what she was after. *Dammit.* 'Olive Hornby,' he said, his mouth quirking up. 'And you?'

'Oh! Umm...' Honora noticed Jamie Whitcomb, the other sixth-year Ravenclaw prefect with Damaris, walking out the door. She knew for a fact he did not have a date yet. 'Jamie!' she said quickly. 'I'm going with Jamie.'

Tom looked bemused. 'Are you, now?'

'Yes,' Honora said, a little more strongly. 'And thank you again for your help on the committee.' She was eager to end this conversation. 'I'm sure all of our fellow orphans will be glad for it, someday.'

He nodded silently.

'Well, uh, bye!' Honora flashed a falsely confident smile and darted out the door.

She ran down the corridor to catch up with Jamie Whitcomb. 'Jamie!' she said, falling into step with him. 'Say, you don't happen to have a date, do you?'

Jamie turned to her. He was a tall whip of a boy, with dark brown hair and hazel eyes. He was quiet, and nice, and highly studious. 'No, I don't,' he replied.

'Well...' Honora smiled warmly up at him, 'Would you consider taking me?'

'All right!' Jamie nodded readily. 'That would be good.'

Honora tried not to show her abject relief. One less thing to worry about. 'I'm so glad! We'll have a wonderful time, I'm sure.' In fact, she was sure they would. Jamie was a good kid and he would not be possessive of her. As part of the committee, he would understand Honora's commitment to keep the ball running smoothly.

She also felt overly glad that she had not botched up inviting Tom Riddle too badly; at least she had not dropped books on her own head or done something equally as clumsy. Her self-assurance must be increasing.

To her vast annoyance, Slughorn set an essay due the day before the ball, on the evolution of medical potions. Researching the history of Sleeping Draught and Skele-Gro was really the last thing Honora wanted to do, especially since the Salvation Ball was the only thing the higher forms could talk about. Well, the higher form girls, anyway.

Lawrence Carter had said yes to Damaris's invitation, and John Parrish was going with Kay. The girls were over the moon. Honora really was pleased for them. Of course, she did not get a fluttery heart over Jamie Whitcomb.

At least you have a date, she thought to herself. Poor Ambrosia Kipley had asked three boys, all of whom had turned her down. *That's because she's ugly and mean and has no friends*, Honora thought. Then she chastised herself for having such a nasty, if honest, thought. All the social pressure must be getting to her.

Two mornings before the great event, Honora was picking at her breakfast in the Great Hall. She had put off finishing her Potions essay, and still had eight more inches of parchment to write. There was all the last minute decision-making and organising for the ball. To top it all, Honora's dress robes had *not* arrived from the seamstress. She was beginning to feel panicked.

Kay rubbed her back reassuringly. 'Don't worry, they'll get here,' she said. 'I'm sure Gladrags is doing a lot for the ball. They know how important it is. I heard that three extra seamstresses were hired for this week.'

'What if they don't?' Honora said redundantly.

'They will! And you'll get everything else done, too. If you quit worrying, that is, and drink some tea.'

Honora smiled weakly. Tea did help. With a palpitation in her stomach, she heard a fluttering and looked up: the post had arrived. Her eyes frantically searched the owls for any packages. With a yelp of relief, she caught her brown package marked 'Dress Robes: Miss Honora Crowley.'

'See! What did I tell you?' Kay laughed at her.

'Oooh, your robes!' Damaris leaned over Honora's shoulder. 'Well, let's have a look, then.'

'Not here!' Honora said. 'I don't want anyone seeing.'

‘What about me?’ Ash Wynn poked his head their way. He was taking their dorm-mate, Willow McLeod, to the ball. It had caused some amusement; Honora had dubbed them the ‘trees’, Ash and Willow.

‘You’ll see them at the ball,’ Honora said stubbornly. She gulped the rest of her tea, scalding her throat slightly. ‘Come on, girls.’

They raced back up to Ravenclaw Tower. Honora felt energised by the prospect of new clothes. Most of her garments were so practical; with the exception of a few dresses, she had to work to make herself fashionable. Like any girl, the idea of wearing a beautiful dress was enough to send her spinning.

The three girls burst into their room, startling Willow, who was still getting ready for the day.

‘Her robes arrived!’ Damaris explained.

‘Oh! Let me see!’ Willow said.

‘Patience, patience!’ yelled Honora. Then with a squeal she dived at the package and tore open the paper. A spill of champagne-coloured satin fell out.

‘Ahh! Look at it!’ Damaris shrieked.

With a flourish, Honora held up the dress. Oohs and ahhs echoed around her. It was an elegant one-shoulder draped sheath with detailed gold and copper beaded accents on the shoulder and hem. The left shoulder held the dress up and then fell down the back.

‘Behold the Grecian glory!’ Honora announced, with a joyful laugh. ‘Men, kneel at our feet and weep for mercy.’

‘Oh, we are going to *kill*!’ Damaris giggled loudly. Willow grabbed Kay and began dancing around the room in imitation of a wild waltz. Honora shot bubbles from her wand. It was a merry time, for being eight in the morning.

‘I wonder who Tom Riddle is taking to the dance,’ sighed Willow, flopping down onto her bed. ‘I think he’s just...the cat’s meow!’

‘He’s taking Olive Hornby,’ Honora said curtly, rolling her eyes. ‘Why do you like him so much?’

‘Oh, but he’s such a catch!’ Willow sat up, enthused to discuss her crush. ‘Clever, handsome, and there’s something about him that’s so, I don’t know how to describe it...’

‘Evil?’ muttered Honora.

‘Charismatic,’ decided Willow. She shrugged. ‘Oh, well. He’s unattainable, besides.’

Honora busied herself by hanging her beautiful dress on her canopy bed.

Once she had her dress robes, Honora felt motivated to finish Slughorn’s blasted essay. She skived off morning Herbology, and wrote hard for an hour and a half about the discovery of powdered moonstone as an ingredient in the Draught of Peace as a treatment for anxiety disorders. The night before the ball, Honora, Damaris, Kay, and several fifth-year girls commandeered the prefect’s bathroom for a highly relaxing spa treatment.

Saturday dawned cold and clear, and Honora was up at seven-thirty. She scrubbed her face clean, not wanting to put on any makeup until the ball. She threw on a jumper already ruined by a Potions explosion, and tied her hair in a loose ponytail. Then Honora jumped on Damaris and Kay and made a trumpet-like sound with her hand.

‘Rise and shine, ladies! Time to transform this school!’ In anticipation of the ball, the house elves would be serving buffet breakfast and lunch in the individual house common rooms. Everyone else would be downstairs.

Honora marched into the Great Hall, pumping with energy. The boys and girls who had volunteered to help had mostly arrived by nine, and started transfiguring the long dining tables into smaller round tables that sat up to ten people, dotting the edges of the hall. The Herbology professor brought in carts of red poppies grown especially for the occasion, which were charmed into garlands and swagged along the sides for flowery effect. Even the reluctant help of the curmudgeonly

caretaker, Apollyon Pringle, was enlisted to haul in an old stone fountain from an unused courtyard. The fountain was frosted in white and filled with water, for making wishes.

Honora occupied herself by working on the charms for the ceiling, to turn the stars red and white. It was difficult work, requiring a great deal of sustained concentration. In a room filled with working, laughing, talking students, this was a challenge. House-elves scurried around under her feet, and she kept dodging moving furniture and floating candles, meanwhile keeping a sharp eye on her volunteer workers.

‘Danny, those chairs go over there!’ ‘The torches need to be red and gold, yes I *know* they’re Gryffindor colours but they provide the best lighting!’ ‘Make sure the food tables are fully ready for the house-elves...’ Honora shook her head in frustration, refocusing herself on the ceiling. It was only about halfway done.

Suddenly an arm cinched her about the waist, and pulled her backwards. ‘Watch yourself, there!’

With a gasp of shock, Honora watched, wide-eyed, as a huge, heavy table swung through the air at her, so close to her head she could feel a breeze as it whizzed past. Turning to her rescuer, she found herself nose to nose with Tom Riddle, who quickly dropped his arm from around her. The thought of ‘*Maybe he’s not so bad*’ floated, unbidden, through Honora’s mind.

‘Pay more attention,’ Riddle said, holding his spine stiffly straight, and clasping his hands behind his back in a gesture that was oddly self-conscious.

‘Right, thanks,’ said Honora. To break the tension, she looked toward John Parrish, the culprit. ‘For Merlin’s sake, John! Learn your Levitation charms before you kill somebody.’

‘Sorry, Honora!’ John called.

She waved a hand, signifying it was alright. ‘I’m in your debt,’ she turned to Riddle, wishing it had been someone else to pull her out of the way.

'I'll have to make sure you repay me some time,' Riddle said, deadpan.

'We'll see,' Honora said with a smirk.

The hours flew by, Honora skipped lunch and before she knew it, the room was coming together beautifully. The Floating Strings arrived, and they set up their instruments behind a red and gold screen appropriated from Gryffindor House. The buffet table was set up and awaited the appearance of food from the kitchens. The items up for silent auction were in their display cases. The ball started at eight o'clock.

At six, Honora swallowed a dose of Invigoration Draught and looked around the Great Hall one last time. Satisfied, she turned to go back to Ravenclaw Tower and get ready.

On her way out, she saw Riddle giving stern directions to Court Aiken, who would be taking tickets at the door. Honora stopped for a moment.

'Looks like we're ready, then,' she said to Riddle.

'It appears so,' he agreed.

Honora smiled up at him. 'Don't be surprised if you don't recognise me in two hours,' she said, thinking of her new dress.

'Oh, I'm sure I'll recognise you,' Riddle replied. A hint of a smile flared in the shady depths of his eyes.

'See you soon, then,' Honora turned away with a coy little wave over her shoulder.

She smiled as she walked away, pleased that she and Tom Riddle were becoming on such friendly terms. She was almost becoming accustomed to him. A hundred small, innocuous interactions had created an expectation of normality that a hidden part of her knew was dangerous. With every polite greeting, every nod of the head, her guard lowered itself a bit more. It was happening in spite of herself; her inner knowledge of Riddle's black soul did not match up with his

outer behaviour, lulling her into complacency and near-admiration of him.

His smooth confidence, cool and unflappable; his obvious intellectual brilliance; his striking good looks; all combined to create an exquisite masquerade. Riddle was undoubtedly attractive, until Honora forcibly reminded herself that he was Lord Voldemort in disguise. *Whoever said the Devil was beautiful must have known Tom Riddle*, she thought to herself with an inner twist of fascinated dread.

Picking up her pace, she dashed toward Ravenclaw and arrived in the common room. Wolfing down a ham and cheese sandwich, then showering and drying her hair with her wand, it was seven by the time Honora walked into her dormitory.

'You better catch up!' Willow said, applying several coats of mascara to her eyelashes.

'She's been busy, haven't you, Honora?' Kay said. Kay was already dressed in lovely light blue robes of diaphanous chiffon.

'Oh my goodness, yes,' Honora collapsed onto her bed, still in her bathrobe. Then she shot back up. 'But thank heavens for Invigoration Draught.' She got out a box and began applying her own makeup. She powdered her face, lined her eyes with kohl, added mascara, and continued to tweak until she was satisfied.

Damaris flicked one of her curlers at Honora, disturbing her concentration.

'Hey!' she protested.

'Watch this,' Damaris said. She disappeared behind her bed curtains and then reappeared, wearing a stunning dress of peach crepe.

'Ooh, la la!' Honora said, impressed. With a sigh, she realised that whatever chance she had once had with Lawrence Carter was likely to go out the window tonight.

'Damaris, you look like a perfect peach,' Kay giggled.

'Kee-hee!' Damaris popped her foot up and posed with her hands.

Honora kept up with her beautification routine, calmed by its ritual. Everything was coming together, and soon her triumphant ball would commence.

